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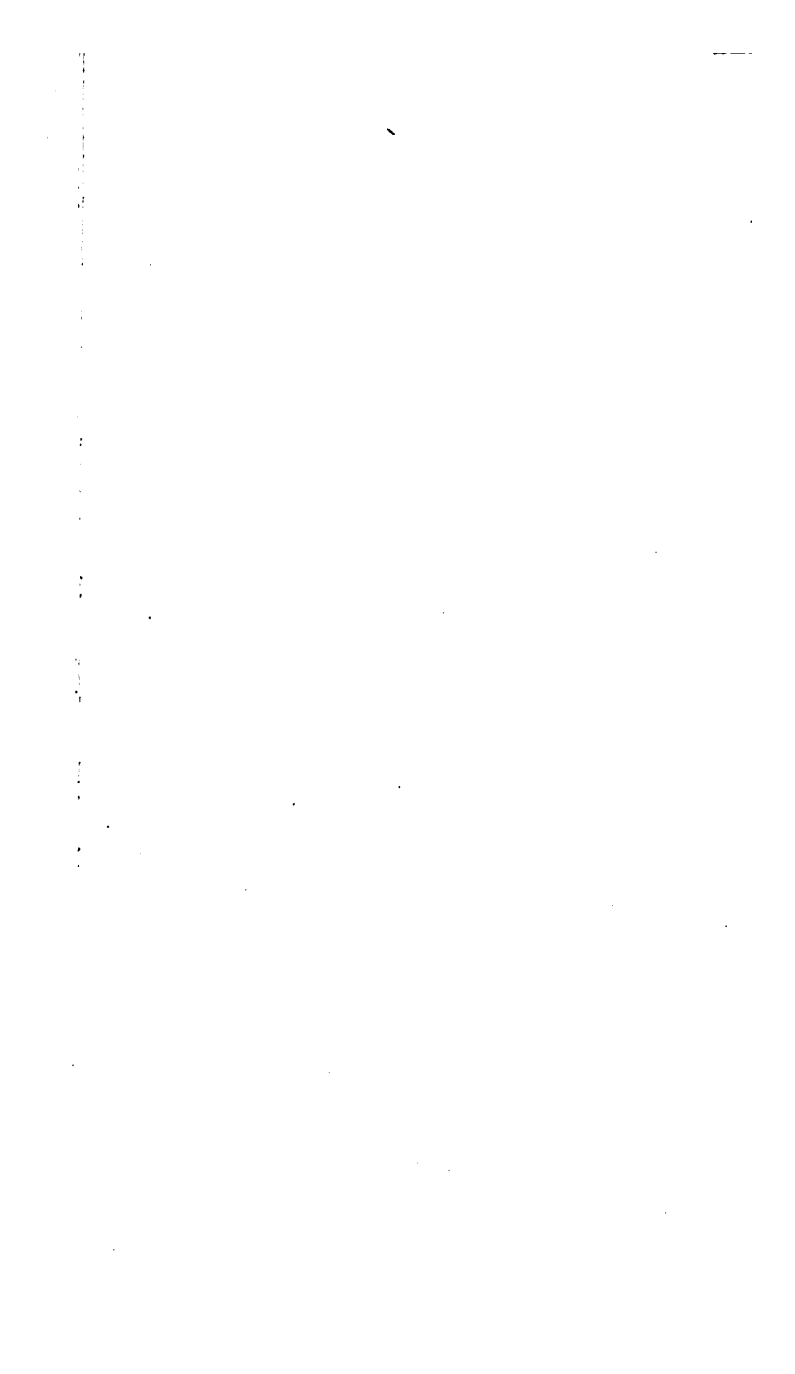


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A
C O L L E C T I O N

O F

S E R M O N S,

S H E W I N G

**The Grounds of the LORD's Controversy
with this Church and Land, in respect of
the Prevalence of Error, the abounding of
Immoralities, Contempt of the glorious
Gospel, Breach of solemn Engagements,
awful Abuse of God's Goodness, &c.**

Together with

**The Duty of SAINTS and SINNERS in the Prospect
of threatened Strokes on these Accounts.**

**Preached from different Texts of Scripture, and on
several Occasions, particularly Fast-days.**

By the late Reverend and Learned

MR THOMAS BOSTON,

Minister of the Gospel at ETTRICK,

Author of the Fourfold State, A View of the Covenants
of Works and Grace.

Now first published from the Author's original Manuscripts, as peculiarly applicable to the present Times.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, Rev. iii. 22.

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P R E F A C E

By a FRIEND. •

THE following sermons were lent to the prefacer by the Rev. Mr Michael Boston, the author's grandson. The perusal of them in the original manuscript gave him so much pleasure, and they appeared to be so applicable to the case of the present time, that he could not resist an inclination to transcribe them, and give them to the publisher. They are transcribed without any additions or alterations whatever, except what are merely verbal: so that the discourses are the genuine composition of the worthy author, whose praise is in all the churches.

The reader will see from the titles and dates of the several sermons, that they were preached at different times, and on various occasions, particularly on days of solemn fasting: on which it is rational to think, that so holy and judicious a minister, so accurate an observer of the times, one whose heart glowed with zeal for the glory of God, the purity and peace of the church, and the advantage of his country, would freely declare his opinion as to the state of public matters, and the evidences of the divine displeasure with the generation.

In the first sermon the author has in view the injury he supposed was done to gospel-truth by the acts of assembly 1720 and 1722, in condemning a book, entitled, *The Marrow of modern Divinity*, wherein the two following propositions were stigmatized as erroneous, viz. *That as the law is the covenant of works, believers are wholly and altogether set free from it; and, That believers are set free both from the commanding and condemning power of the covenant of works; and by a former assembly's condemning as unsound and most detestable another proposition, That it is not sound and orthodox to teach, that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ.* Our author has illustrated and vindicated

these three propositions in his notes on the *Marrow*, and more largely in that excellent work of his just now published, entitled, *A View of the Covenant of Works from the sacred Records*. It is a pity that this book was not published along with his *View of the Covenant of Grace*, as they are both on the same plan, they mutually illustrate each other, and the latter is a continuation of the former. Its emerging now out of its long obscurity, may be considered as a great mercy to the generation, and a seasonable and valuable acquisition to the cause of Christianity. It may be very safely said, that these two books are by far the most elaborate, judicious, and evangelical treatises on these subjects that have hitherto appeared in the Christian church. So that, in respect of them and his other excellent writings, we may say of our author, as did the late Mr Ralph Erskine,

*His golden pen to future times will bear
His fame, till in the clouds his Lord appear.*

Since the time of passing the above-mentioned acts, so injurious to some precious gospel-truths, a flood of Pelagian, Arminian, Socinian, and Arian errors has overspread the land, and errors everfive of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, are publicly taught from some pulpits, nay published to the world, without check or control. *And if the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?*

Our author has spoke pretty fully of the abounding sin and impiety of the age; which, alas, has fearfully increased since his time, particularly horrid and profane swearing, perjury, fornication, adultery, robbery, and murder; so that *because of these things the land mourneth*. And if we add thereto our fashionable and polite diversions, such as theatrical entertainments, balls, &c. together with contempt of the gospel, profanation of the Lord's day, luxury, pride, corruption, and abuse of mercies, which the Lord has visibly punished, for several years past, by unfavourable seasons and dearth of the necessaries of life,

P R E F A C E.

we may lay our account with some heavy judgements being inflicted upon us.

There are some particulars mentioned by our author as grounds of the Lord's controversy with the land, which some of our modern clergy will not be disposed to view in the same light. But the friends of truth will surely think, that the opinion of the GREAT MR BOSTON is more to be regarded than that of moral haranguers, or the whole tribe of our historian, philosophical, poetical, and tragedian divines, who seem to be far from relishing the pure truths of the gospel, and doctrines of the reformation.

The following sermons may therefore be considered as the testimony of a faithful minister, who has long ago entered into his Master's joy, against the overspreading errors, wickedness, and abominations of the day, and as pointing out the duty of saints and sinners in such perilous times.

As one or two of the sermons are but short, some may be apt to think that they are not so full as they were delivered. It appears that Mr Boston was not a verbose, but concise preacher; and his intimate friends and contemporaries assert, that he generally wrote his sermons as full as he delivered them.

It shall only be further added, that if the author's excellent book, just published, entitled, *A View of the Covenant of Works from the sacred Records*, shall meet with due encouragement, as the importance and utility of the subject give ground to think it will, the prefacer is authorised to say, that the Rev. Mr Boston, the author's grandson, who is possessed of all his manuscripts, will be induced to publish some other excellent treatises and sermons of our author, which are very elaborate and exact, on subjects of the last importance to the souls of men. And it is hoped, that his great work on the Shorter Catechism, which is now transcribing for the press, will meet with ample encouragement, especially as his former works have met with a kind reception, and had a rapid sale.

Edinburgh, April 28. 1772.

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A VIEW of the COVENANT of WORKS from the SACRED RECORDS.

Wherein the parties in that covenant, the reality of it, its parts conditional, promissory, and minatory, our father Adam's breaking of it, the imputation of that breach to his posterity, and the state of man under that broken covenant, and under the curse thereof, are distinctly considered.

To which are annexed, by way of supplement,

Several sermons on the method of recovery from the ruins of the fall by Jesus Christ, and the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

By the late Reverend and Learned
MR THOMAS BOSTON,
Minister of the Gospel at Ettrick,
Author of the Fourfold State, A View of the
Covenant of Grace, &c.

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Commissions from bookfellers in town or in the country, for copies of the above book in quires, may be addressed to J. REID Printer, Bailie Fyfe's close, Edinburgh, who gives them out on account of the Editor, the Rev. Mr Michael Boston minister at Falkirk, the author's grandson.

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... and of the Lord.

...in the Lord Jesus Christ

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...all, that with purpose of
...with the Lord.

The Duty of redeeming the Time in evil Days, illustrated and enforced.



S E R M O N

Preached at ETTRICK, May 27. 1722, being the Lord's day immediately following the rising of the General Assembly that year.

EPHESIANS V. 16.

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

IN the preceding verse, the apostle exhorts the Ephesians to *walk circumspectly*, that is, accurately, exactly, and precisely, endeavouring in the most minute things in their walk to be regular and holy; shewing withal, that true wisdom requires such exactness of life. Our text points out one thing wherein their spiritual wisdom should especially appear, viz. *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* In which words we have,

1. A duty enjoined, *redeeming the time.* The expression is metaphorical, taken from merchants who wait the market, improve the season of making gain; and if at any time they have lost by their negligence, they bestir themselves to catch the season again when it offers. Thus should we do with the time, or season of grace and good works, the season for doing or getting good. That time is often mispent, the season is slept; and we must endeavour to buy it back again, by doubling our diligence in the present time, as the traveller who has gone too slow through the day, labours

bours to redeem the time by mending his pace, when it grows towards evening.

2. The reason of the duty, *because the days are evil*. Not that any days are in themselves evil or unlucky, more than others; but that they were days wherein much evil fell out and was to fall out. The days the apostle speaks of were evil, in respect of the great evils going on in them among men, which put professors in hazard of sinning or suffering. They were ensnaring days, both in respect of principles and practices; false doctrine was vented by many, the resurrection was denied, justification by faith alone opposed, and the purity of the gospel overthrown by many: scandalous practices were introduced; and persecution was raised in several places, and was on the growing hand.

The scope and meaning of the words may be summed up in the following doctrinal note, *viz.*

DOCT. *When mens lot falls in evil days, the evil of these days calls aloud to them to redeem time, and double their diligence.*

For the illustration of this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What it is to redeem time.

II. Why the evil of the days wherein mens lot is cast should move them to redeem time.

III. *Lastly*, Apply the subject in an use of exhortation and of reproof.

I. The first thing proposed is, to shew what it is to redeem time. It imports,

1. A conviction of mispending of time, and misimproving seasons of grace. Those will never set themselves to redeem time, who are not duly convinced of their squandering it away, selling it off, and not enriching themselves with the price. We have seen better days than now they are; glorious days of the Son of man have been in Scotland, in purity, plenty, and peace. But may not the looking
back

back to the improvement made of them, fill us with convictions of misimprovement? And,

(1.) How many are there, who to this day are out of Christ, and have no saving interest in the covenant of grace, but are *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world?* Eph. ii. 12. If the market of free grace were closed, they, poor souls, have as yet bought none of Christ's wares, for as long as they have stood in the market-place.

(2.) What have ye done for God, and what have you done for eternity, in the time which ye have had? God's glory is the end of your creation; the work he has put in your hand to fill up your time with, is to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. Ye were not set down in the world, as the leviathan in the sea, to play yourselves; but to honour God, and see to your eternal salvation. Now much of that time is over. Ye have done much to advance your worldly interest, to satisfy your lusts, to dishonour God, and to ruin your own souls; but what have ye done for God's glory and your souls salvation?

(3.) Who of us all have done for God, what we might have done, and what we have had opportunity to have done? Have we not slept many precious occasions that might have been improved for the honour of God? Has not a vain world often cheated us, and spiritual slothfulness cast us into a deep sleep, and an inactive frame and disposition, while fair and promising occasions have slipped through our fingers?

(4.) Has any of us got that victory over our corruptions, or made such advances in holiness of heart and life, as are answerable to the time that we have had under the means of grace? Have we grown up in grace, answerable to the years of our standing in the Lord's vineyard?

(5.) Are ye provided for a time of trial, and furnished for a wilderness-journey? If not, surely it is neither

for want of warning, nor want of time and opportunity; but by mispending of time. A day of common calamity seems to be making haste upon us; but are our chambers of protection provided by us to enter into? A darkness, a mist is arisen in the way to Zion; are you so acquainted with the way in the clear day, as to be capable to know the road even in a mist?

(6.) Lastly, Are your evidences for heaven clear? We know not how soon we are to pass off into another world; but, alas! it is to be feared, that many have no evidences at all for a better world; and that such as have, theirs are very dark. These things may suffice to convince of mispending of time; the redeeming of which imports a conviction of.

2. To redeem time, imports activity and application to our great work which we have to do in the world. Thus we find the spouse setting herself to redeem time, Cant. iii. 1. 2. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.* We must at length bestir ourselves, shake off sloth, be denied to our carnal ease, and ply our work in good earnest. Merchants who through their own slothfulness have missed their market at a time, will do so that they may get their loss made up; and Christians must do so too, who mind to redeem their time; for there is no getting sleeping to heaven.

3. It imports catching of seasons that offer themselves again for procuring or increasing our spiritual stock. We must be sober, and watch unto prayer, 1 Pet. iv. 7. We must do as Benbadad's servants did, 1 Kings xx. 33. *Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it.* As men who being to go a long voyage, but have slept while wind and tide served, and so missed the occasion of setting off, will watch the first opportunity thereafter, and lay hold on it when

when it comes. Many a fair occasion for Immanuel's land has been neglected; O that at length we were wise to let no more slip!

4. Lastly, It imports improving the present time diligently, as men who have a great loss to make up. Thus did the spouse, Cant. iii. 4. *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.* There is no other way of redeeming past time, but by better improving the present time while it is among our hands. We should then be more frequent and more fervent in spiritual exercises, carefully laying out ourselves, that the time remaining may be filled up to the best advantage. Time is precious, let us not be lavish of it any more.

II. The second head of discourse is to shew, why the evil of the days wherein mens lot is cast should move them to redeem time.

1. Because it is the mispending of time and misimproving the seasons of grace, that brings such evil days on a church or people called by the name of Christ. That is the fixed rule of God's dispensations towards his church, 2 Chron. xv. 2. *The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* Misimproving of seasons of grace makes sinning times, and sinning times make ensnaring, and suffering times. And what is the reason of all the evils of our day, but unfruitfulness under the glorious gospel? The light has been abused, and darkness therefore comes on: we have long had light without heat and warmth of affection, and therefore the light itself is on the declining hand. And it is highly reasonable, that smarting under mispending of time we be stirred up to redeem it.

2. Because such days threaten the removal of opportunities.

tunities of doing and getting good as formerly, Eccl. xi. 2. *Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.* The days of Noah and Lot were evil days; and they redeemed time, the one by preparing an ark timely, the other by a timely escape out of Sodom: and had they not done so, the one had been carried away with the deluge, and the other had perished in the flames of Sodom. They that will not do when they may, may come to see the time when they shall not have opportunity when they would. When men have no use for God's candle set up among them to let them see to work, he will readily take it away, or at least it shall burn very dim. Redeem time; for God is plainly saying to you, *Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken, and bear for the time to come?* Is. xlii. 23. :

3. Because such days are dangerous and ensnaring days, and therefore people have the more need to be on their guard: And if they do not set themselves to row against the stream of the day, they will be fair to be carried down the stream with others. Therefore our Lord says, *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold,* Matth. xxiv. 12. When a land or country is infected with the plague, every one sees himself obliged to take more than ordinary care about himself, lest the spreading contagion catch hold of him: now, spiritual infection in principles and practices are visibly spreading at this day; and we are like men in a throng, if we do not forcibly press forward, we cannot miss to be carried off our feet, and carried backward by the croud. The cause of truth and holiness is so fully on the field against a declining generation, that no man can stand neutral, but he must lose ground to the enemy.

4. Because God is much dishonoured in such days; and that should touch our hearts very nearly. This was David's practice, Psal. cxix. 136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law.* It is very natural for the children of God, when

when they see their Father remarkably dishonoured, that their hearts stir within them, as was the case of Paul, when he was at Athens, and *saw the city wholly given to idolatry*, Acts xvii. 16. Remarkable is the story of the dumb son of Cræsus king of Lydia, who, seeing a soldier, when his father's capital city, Sardis, was taken by Cyrus the Persian, ready to give the king, whom he did not know, a stroke upon the head with his scimitar, made such a violent effort and struggle, out of fear and tenderness for the life of his father, that he broke the strings of his tongue, and cried out, *Soldier, spare the life of Cræsus*. The further others go from him, they will endeavour to draw the nearer to him. At such a time there is a special call from Heaven, saying, *Who is on my side?* And when the honour of God so lies at stake, in the conspiracy of a generation against it, it is sad for men to be asleep; nay, it is high time to awake.

5. Because as redeeming of time is always seasonable, so it is in a special manner seasonable when the days are evil. There is a peculiar beauty in it to be best when others are worst, to be awake when the virgins round about are slumbering and sleeping. God takes special notice of such; as in the case of Noah, of whom it is said, Gen. vi. 9. *Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God*; and also in the case of Lot, of whom the apostle Peter says, 2 epist. ii. 7. 8. *God delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds*. Redeem time in these evil days, so shall ye outshoot Satan in his own bow, and turn the cannon upon him, who endeavours to carry you away with the stream. To take occasion from good to do evil is devilish, but to take occasion from evil to do good is divine.

6. Because mens own interest lies in it. They that are awake in a way of duty while others sleep,
shall

8 *The Duty of redeeming the Time,*

shall rest in a way of privilege when the peace of others shall be broken, Hab. iii. 16.—*I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.* To stand at a distance from sinful courses, in a sinning time, is the way to safety and comfort in a suffering time. Hence is that commission from the Lord in favour of his people, Ezek. ix. 4. *Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.* It is pleasing to the flesh to go with the multitude, in a time of God's patience with a sinful generation: but when the Lord comes to plead his controversy with the generation, there will be a dreadful reckoning, and they will then come off with loss. *But thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy,* Rev. iii. 4.

7. Lastly, This is a rational way of acting, and so do wise men in their temporal affairs. If a harvest-day be cloudy or windy, do not men the more vigorously handle their sickles? If a dearth be feared, are not men the more careful to provide for themselves? Even the very ants are busy in harvest, while the winter is approaching. But, alas! the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light; and the sluggard needs to be set to school to learn of the ants.

I come now to the application of this doctrine, which is the principal thing I had in view. And

USE I. shall be of exhortation. O let us be stirred up to redeem time, because our days are evil. Alas! our days are evil days with a witness, and they are still growing worse and worse; and the progress in the way of evil is so swift, that we seem to be very near arrived at that pitch, at which the Lord's anger may be expected to break forth into a flame. Our days are evil days in several respects; in respect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion;—in
respect

respect of abounding sin ;—in respect of the hiding of the Lord's face ;—in respect of threatened wrath and impending judgments ;—and in respect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away.

First, Our days are evil days in respect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion. The tares are sown and grow apace in the Lord's field. Papists are spreading their poison, and Prelatists theirs, without due check or control. A spirit of apostasy from the faith once delivered to the saints, appears eminently in these our unhappy days, wherein the very foundations of religion are struck at, and the mysteries of it called to an account before the bar of corrupted reason, and measured with the crooked reed of man's natural sight. And at this day is that fulfilled amongst us in this church, which the apostle addressed to the elders of the church of Ephesus, *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*, Acts xx. 30. The spring of gospel-doctrine, which sometime ran clear, is now disturbed, truth is fallen in our streets, and equity cannot enter, and Zion's wounds are multiplied in the house of her friends. The days are evil on this account : for,

1. It is very dishonourable to our Lord Jesus Christ, the purchase of whose blood gospel-truths are ; for of them we should never have heard, had not he given himself to the death for lost sinners. And the more they are obscured and veiled, the more is the Mediator's glory eclipsed ; which may be matter of mourning to those who love his name.

2. It is an evidence that the favour of the glorious gospel is much lost, and that the glorious truths thereof, on which exercised souls have often sweetly fed, are much disrelished. And so it speaks soul-exercise to be very rare, and the experience of the power of truth on mens spirits to be fallen very low.

3. It is a fore-token of the work of conversion, which has long been very rare, its being yet more rare. The gospel is the great mean of conversion of sinners

sinners unto God, Gal. iii. 2. and therefore Satan strives with all his might to pervert it, and so to make it the more unfit for reaching of its end.

4. It is a sad prognostic of the further woful decay of practical godliness. The doctrine which is of God is *according to godliness*, Tit. i. 1.; and that which hath not a tendency to promote real godliness, is not a doctrine from God. The law in its due place leading sinners to Christ, and leading them as a rule of life in Christ, tends to this end: but when it is put out of its due place, it is perverted, and will never produce more like holiness, but a carcase of formal performances unacceptable to God, in some; and more licentiousness and untenderness in others, as may be observed in the lives of those who so handle the law as to confound it with the gospel, John vii. 19. *Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?*

5. There is a bias in the corrupt nature of man in a very eminent measure, whereby people are ready to entertain corrupt principles; and so they are ready to be subverted by them. For there is not an error vented in the world, but it has some one lust or other akin to it in the hearts of men. And there is a peculiar bias to legalism, which is the temptation and snare of our day.

6. Human learning is highly advanced in our days, and the power of godliness is under a great decay. And none are so capable to do a mischief to religion as those learned men, who are strangers to the power of godliness. This is it by which religion comes to be moulded in a suitableness to carnal reason, and so is perverted.

7. It is a great sign of the Lord's anger against a sinful generation, for their not receiving the truth in love. Hence says the apostle, 2 Theff. ii. 10. 11.—*With all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them*

them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. This calls aloud to you to redeem the time; and,

1st, To labour to get the knowledge of the truth, to know what we believe, and to understand the principles of the religion which we profess; and for this cause to improve the means of knowledge. Ignorance is dangerous at all times, especially in such evil days.

2^{dly}, To study to know why you believe, and to understand the reasons of your principles. Hence the apostle Peter exhorts, *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,* 1 Pet. iii. 15. Many have been too easily satisfied with the principles which they have learned, without inquiring into the scripture-grounds of them: but surely this calls aloud to the practice of the Bereans, who were *more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so,* Acts xvii. 11.

3^{dly}, Labour to be experimental Christians, to feel the power of truth in your own souls; to *know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death,* Phil. iii. 10. Raw unfelt notions in the head are easily parted with in a day of trial; but experience of the power of truth rivets it in the heart: which is the true reason why many simple men and women hold fast the truth, when learned divines let it go; for all the human learning in the world will not give men such a hold of the truth as Christian experience will give. These duties the case of our day calls for at all hands.

But for your further direction, as to what is your duty at this day, when the harmony in the song of the watchmen is marred, and some are destroying what others build up, and a spirit of error is undoubtedly gone forth, I would say,

(1.) Be

(1.) Be not ye unconcerned with the public state of affairs in that point. For the honour of God, and the cause of truth, lie at stake: and there is a wo denounced against such careless ones, Amos vi. 1. *Wo to them that are at ease in Zion.* Some, if they get their own worldly affairs right, they are little concerned to know what way it goes with the church and interest of Christ; they think it none of their business, Phil. ii. 21. *For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.* Some, from a profane and wicked principle of looseness, look on the confusions of the day with satisfaction, saying in their hearts, *Aha, so would we have it, like the children of Edom, who said in the day of Jerusalem's distress, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof,* Psal. cxxxvii. 7. Others shew concern about them; but the great thing with them is, thereby to gratify their curiosity, or some particular humour of theirs; but their hearts are not affected with them as kindly children of Zion.

But I would advise you to a cordial concern, in your most secret retirements before the Lord, in these matters. Take to heart the dishonour done to God thereby, the wounds given to truth, the stroke reached to true religion, and the danger to the souls of men. Shew such sympathy with God's interests, as you may be capable to say before the Lord, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me,* Psal. lxxix. 9. *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy,* Psal. cxxxvii. 5. 6. Mourn over these things in secret, as the select few in Jerusalem did, Ezek. ix. 4. forecited. Wrestle with God in prayer for his appearance, for his return to the land, to ordinances, and to the spirits of his ministers and people. Hear what the Lord says, *I have set watchmen upon thy walls,*

O Jerusalem; which shall never hold their peace day nor night : ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Is. lxii. 6. 7.

(2.) Let your hearts be impressed with awful thoughts of the anger of God against the generation, appearing in that matter, Hab. iii. 16. It is an awful thought, that Zion-builders are now turned like Babel-builders, through the anger of God, that they cannot understand one another. It was a sad sign to Jerusalem, when coals of fire were taken from between the cherubims, and scattered over the city, Ezek. x. 2. And when the angel took fire off the altar, and cast it on the earth, Rev. viii. 5. fearful confusions ensued. These coals of fire are scattered amongst us, and the prospect of the issue may cause a serious observer to tremble.

(3.) Be duly affected with the hazard of your own souls in such a time. There is danger on every hand, when the anger of the Lord seems to be against the whole multitude of us. Let no man adventure to lodge the causes of wrath in one party. Some may be deeper than others in the sinful course; but all have a deep hand in the provocation. Hear what the Lord says to Israel, Ezek. vii. 12. 13. 14. *The time is come, the day draweth near : let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn : for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive : for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof, which shall not return : neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life. They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready, but none goeth to the battle : for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof.* There is a danger of straying both to the right and left hand in this time of the Lord's anger. And if the Lord do not pity, there may be frightful monuments

ments of the Lord's anger on both hands, giving up men to strong delusions.

(4.) Give yourselves solemnly away to Christ, to be by him carried safely through the wilderness in the dark and cloudy day. Say with the prophet, *Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will bear me*, Micah vii. 7. In consideration of your danger, take him anew for your guide and leader, saying with the spouse, Cant. i. 7. *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?* Our own wisdom is not to be trusted at any time, especially when the days are evil. Now when you see the mist arising, take fast hold of him; when you see the storm a-coming, chuse him for your pilot, and commit yourselves to his conduct through the waves.

(5.) Keep up habitually a holy jealousy over yourselves, and confidence in the promise of direction, and a conscientious believing use of the means of his appointment. That holy jealousy is necessary in respect of the snares in the evil day, and the corruption of our hearts so ready to entangle us in them. *He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool*, Prov. xxviii. 26. The promises are many on which faith is to be exercised; as, *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way*, Psal. xxv. 9. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye*, Psal. xxxii. 8. *Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left*, Is. xxx. 21. And you must use the means in confidence of the promise, Cant. i. 7. 8. When the spouse prayed for direction, *Tell me, &c.* quoted above, the Bridegroom replied, *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents. Go ye and do likewise.*

(6.) Beware

(6.) Beware of those things particularly, which leave men to be a prey to delusion in evil days, and for which God leaves them to be carried away with the torrent. And these are,

[1.] Worldly-mindedness, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the earth*. Carnal earthly professors are ready to get a cast in such a day; they whose God is the world, will be sure to hold by it, when Christ and the world part. Why has the cause of God so few friends, but because the world has so many? The world's ease, advantage, good word, and its multitude, have a great sway with men, to the prejudice of their duty, as in the case of Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10. who forsook the apostle Paul, *having loved this present world*.

[2.] Instability and wavering, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the sea*. They that have itching ears after novelties, are ready to be caught in the snare. And hence it is, that at this day old solid truths are loathed and disrelished, and the land-marks set by our fathers are removed.

[3.] Pride and self-conceit, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the trees*. None are readier to fall into the snare than those who are high in conceit with themselves. The humble soul lies fairest to make its way fairly through, while the stormy wind blows, and casts down many tall cedars.

[4.] A secret disgust of the truth, through a love to unrighteousness, 2 Thess. ii. 10. forecited. When practical religion decays in a generation, and sin abounds, the truth cannot long miss to be departed from. Lusts secretly entertained in the heart, prepare men for quitting of truth in their judgements.

[5.] Formality, Rev. xi. 2. Those that worship in the outer court, are ready to become a prey to delusion.

(7.) Be much conversant in the scriptures; *Search the scriptures*, says Christ, John v. 39. and there notice what the Spirit of the Lord teaches. The scripture is the reed for measuring the sanctuary; it is the infallible word, the only foundation of divine

faith. Try what ye hear by it, as the noble Bereans did, for which they are highly commended.

(8.) Lastly, Be tender and holy in your walk. *If any man will do his will, says our Lord, John vii. 17. he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* Where men are conscientious to practise known truth, there is hope of being led into all truth; while otherwise the Spirit of the Lord being grieved departs.

Secondly, Our days are evil days, in respect of abounding sin. The generation wherein we live hath signalized itself for looseness and licentiousness, and our iniquity is gone up unto the heavens, and the measure of it is fast, very fast filling up. *Our land, we may say, is filled with sin against the holy One of Israel, Jer. li. 5.* The abounding of sin in our day appears in that,

1. Sins of all sorts are to be found amongst us, whether against the first or second table. The truth is, contempt of God and of religion hath made most fearful advances: the gospel is despised, the holy laws of God are violated, his bands are broken, and his cords cast away. The land is defiled with idolatry, superstition, sinful swearing, Sabbath-breaking, unfaithfulness in all relations, murders, uncleanness, dishonesty and fraud, lying, and covetousness. And what can be found among a people professing the name of Christ to bring wrath on them, that is not to be found in Scotland at this day? Particularly, there are two signs of a generation posting to ruin, that have appeared of late more than for many years before.

(1.) Horrid blasphemies, shewing what height the generation is come to in contempt of God. Not only is there a fearful outbreaking of blasphemous principles, overturning the very foundations of Christianity; but many fearful blasphemies and blasphemous practices have been occasionally vented and set up of late, to fill up the measure of the iniquity of the land.

(2.) Rampant oppression, to shew what a low pass humanity

humanity is at in these dregs of time. I doubt if there be any alive that ever saw as much oppression in this land, when it was neither a time of war, nor of persecution, as we have neither of them at this day. When was that so much verified as at this day, *The people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable, Is. iii. 5.* These things can hardly miss to fill our cup to the brim.

2. Corruption of manners has overspread all ranks in church and state; and it is come to that, Gen. vi. 12. *God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.* Not only religion, but sobriety is almost gone out of fashion with those of the greater sort, so that they have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds; and the meaner sort follow the example, alas! too much; and there is a visible growing untenderness among those whose character and office in the church obliges them to give a holy example to both. So that look after religion where you will, it will be found at a very low pass in the practice of it.

3. Religion is so much on the declining hand, that there is not so much as a standing still and not mending, but a growing worse and worse still. The generation is still going forward in apostasy from God, and not going, but running further and further wrong. New causes of wrath are still produced in the progress of time; and Satan's kingdom is visibly increasing. The evil are growing worse and worse, and many sometime hopeful have taken off the mask, and appear in their native colours.

4. The sins of sons and daughters are more and greater than ordinary. They are so mixed with the men of the world, that they have learned much of their way, and have *left their first love*, Rev. ii. 4. There is a cloud even upon them, so that they have

not that life, spirit, and tenderness that some times they had. And they that depart from evil make themselves a prey.

And what makes these days of abounding sin worse, is,

1st, That they are come in over the belly of much light. Our days have been days of much gospel-light, but the truth has been held in unrighteousness, and men have rebelled against the light: so the light is grown weaker, and the works of darkness have got the upper hand.

2^{dly}, Our national hazards and deliverances have been many and signal; and behold the fruit of them, as if we had been delivered to do all these abominations. If either threatened judgements or merciful deliverances could have cured us, we had been in another case at this day: but all these things seem to have been blasted.

3^{dly}, There are few, very few to stand in the gap, Ezek. xxii. 30. Few that have either heart or hand to oppose themselves to the torrent of wickedness: few mourners over the abominations done in the midst of us. I doubt not but there are some who truly sigh and cry for the abounding sin of our day. But I doubt if our Zion these many years has afforded fewer of that sort. These our provocations have been of so long continuance, that though at their first appearance they were moving, yet the horror of them seems to be abated by custom; besides that many of the sometimes mourners in Zion are themselves deeply involved in the backsliding courses of the day.

These things make our days evil days: for,

(1.) The dishonour done to God, and the provocation thereby given to the eyes of his glory, is great beyond expression: *The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, through you*, says Paul to the Romans, chap. ii. 24. Our land has been singularly privileged, being married to the Lord in solemn covenant,

nant, and her renown has sometimes gone through many nations: But, ah! how is God dishonoured, and religion exposed, by such fearful departures from the Lord!

(2.) They are ensnaring days. O how hard is it for people to keep their feet in such a day, and not to be carried away with the stream? Rev. iii. 5. How hard is it to keep up a due horror of sin, while on every hand of us it is so lightly looked upon? Temptation is strong in such a day.

(3.) They are days that while they last, little good and great can well be expected in them. Hence said the Lord by the man of God unto Eli, *Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed,* 1 Sam. ii. 30. A generation so much dishonouring God, it can little be expected that God will honour. We would fain hope that the Lord will yet bring glorious days; but it is very probable that many of us of the present generation shall be shovelled out of the way in the first place. Hence saith the Lord, Ezek. xx. 37. 38. *I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me.*

(4.) The consequences of them can hardly miss to be dreadful. *Shall I not visit for these things?* saith the Lord: *shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* Jer. ix. 9. Where sin comes to such a height, readily severe judgements quickly follow. And we can see nothing that may give any hope that we shall miss to see sad days, but that the Lord can pour out his Spirit, and turn us back: but, alas! in the mean time we look always the longer unlike such a merciful turn in our affairs.

(5.) Lastly, They have a sad aspect on posterity. The Jews crucified Christ above sixteen hundred years ago, and their children to this day are smarting under it. And sure I am, if matters continue in the course they are in at this day in this land any long

long time, the succeeding generation will be in a miserable plight.

These things call aloud to redeeming of time. And,

1. Consider well your own ways, that you may see if you be joined or not in the conspiracy against God with the generation; Hag. i. 5. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.* Alas! it may be easily seen, that most of us are deep in the score, and none of us can wipe our mouths, and say justly, we have not sinned, we have not had a hand in the general declining.

2. Bestir yourselves, and *save yourselves from this untoward generation*, Acts ii. 40. Take another way than the common course of the day wherein you live. God is saying, *Come out from among them, my people, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing*—stand at a distance from their sinful ways, and be not partakers with their sins, lest ye partake of their plagues.

3. Live near God, and by your tender holy walking give a practical testimony against the abounding sin of the day. Advert to the saying of the wise man, Prov. xxviii. 4. *They that forsake the law, praise the wicked: but such as keep the law, contend with them.*

4. Be mourners in Zion, wrestlers with the Lord in the case of the evil of the days. Mourn for your own sins and the sins of others.

5. Lastly, Strengthen and stir up one another in the way of the Lord. The people of God had need to animate one another in duty, in a special manner when the torrent of sin runs high, that so they may the better oppose it, and keep themselves from being carried away with it. Follow the practice of the Lord's people who lived in a very declining time of the Jewish church, recorded Mal. iii. 16. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance*

brance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

Thirdly, Our days are evil, in regard they are days of the hiding of the Lord's face. Well may we say as *Is. xlv. 15.* *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour.* The Lord's gracious appearances in the powerful operations of his Holy Spirit on the souls of men, make good days; and sometimes there have been such eminently good days: but, alas! our days are evil, being days of God's hiding his face; whereof take these evidences.

1. The little power and efficacy on the souls of men, that accompanies ordinances at this day. Well may we say, as *Is. liii. 1.* *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* A sound work of conviction is very rare, and the work of conversion is yet more rare. The word is heard, but where is the fruit of it? They that were filthy are filthy still. The profane are not reformed, the secure sinner is not awakened, the formal professor is not brought acquainted with the power of godliness, and they that have the root of the matter in them are not so liberally fed as sometimes they were. Whence is all this, but that the Lord hides himself, and appears not in the assemblies of his people as sometime a-day? We have finned away his presence, and provoked him to say, *Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them.* *Is. i. 14.*

2. The great rarity of lively experienced Christians in our day. It is the promise, *Mal. iv. 2.* *Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.* Some such there are, but, alas! the number of them is very small. Most of the virgins are asleep; deadness and formality, and estrangedness from the life of faith, prevail among those who are called by the Lord's name; and soul-exercise

exercise is rare to be heard of. The best that can be made of our case is that, Rev. iii. 4. *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*

3. The divisions, dissensions, and opposition one to another, that are to be found among the Lord's own saints and people. Sometimes there has been in our land a very fair separation betwixt the enemies and the friends of real godliness; so that whatever difficulties the children of God had with the common adversary, they were at one among themselves: but now, alas! it is otherwise; the Lord's own children are fallen out by the way, and those who are dear to God, and shall meet in heaven, cannot hit it upon earth. For the Lord is hiding his face from us, and we are left in a mist.

4. The Spirit of counsel and wisdom is with-held. In the management of civil and church matters at this day, that seems to be much accomplished, Is. xxix. 14.—*The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.* We are rowed into deep waters, and instead of bringing us safe back, we are carried further and further into the depths. The Lord is provoked to withdraw, and so our wounds cannot be healed. The days must needs be evil in this respect: for,

1st, Such days cannot be thriving days for religion, and the cause and interest of God; Psal. lxxxi. 12. *I gave them up, says JEHOVAH, unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.* When the sun withdraws in the winter, nothing can be expected but that the face of the earth will be barren: and when the Lord hides his face from a church, matters cannot prosper there. Backslidings are increased, all goes to wreck, for that which holds matters right is withdrawn.

2^{dly}, Such a day is a day of spiritual plagues. As God's presence goes, all darkness, disorder, and confusion

fusion follows, according to the measure of the Lord's withdrawing. The gospel does men hurt instead of doing them good; the wild grapes of wickedness are brought forth instead of good grapes, &c.

This calls aloud for redeeming of time; and,

(1.) To bestir ourselves to lament after, and to lay hold upon a departing God and glory. We should make that our work, 1 Sam. vii. 2. *All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.* And let it not be said of us as H. lxiv. 7. *There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.* We should be as Jacob, saying, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,* Gen. xxxii. 26. and the disciples, *Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent,* Luke xxiv. 29. And this we should be as we would not be esteemed to be of the Gadarene temper, who besought Christ to depart out of their coasts. O cry mightily, that the Lord may not leave us nor forsake us.

(2.) Endeavour to walk uprightly in such a crooked generation; for in the worst of times such shall get good of the Lord's word, Micah ii. 7. *Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?* The Lord never forsakes his people utterly; and the more that any do set themselves to be perfect in their generation, they may be sure it will go the better with their spirits.

(3.) Lastly, Double your diligence in secret duties; be much in prayer; and especially cry with much fervency to find a meal for yourselves in public ordinances. I think we ought to consider, when we are to go to ordinances, that this is a day of the hiding of the Lord's face, wherein he is angry with our mother, and therefore is but little seen in her house; and therefore we had need to be more importunate in setting the appointment.

Fourthly, Our days are evil, in regard they are
days

days of threatened wrath and impending judgements. The clouds of wrath are hanging over our heads, and we have many sad presages of a stroke. We may here notice three things.

1. The sins of the generation are come to a monstrous height. And as the progress thereof is somewhat unordinary, so it seems to shew that the cup of these nations is near the brim.

2. The Lord's hand has been heavily laid on a nation abroad, from which these nations have taken an example of sinning, and the Lord may justly punish us accordingly *.

3. Enemies are still busy in their contrivances to bring the nations into blood and confusion; and the increase of Popery, and the divisions in the nations on civil and sacred concerns, do expose us to be the more easy prey.

This calls aloud to the redeeming of time; and,

1st, To awaken out of sleep, and seriously to consider the signs of the time, the tokens of wrath gone out against us, that the day may not overtake us unawares, Matth. xvi. 3. We have had many warnings of an approaching stroke, but mercy has so often interposed for our delivery, that grace to improve them not coming along with them, we are generally more secure than formerly; and the more secure, the more likely is the stroke to be near: 1 Theff. v. 3. *For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

2^{dly}, To prepare for a time of trial, Amos iv. 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* The time should be improved as Noah did his, Heb. xi. 7. *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared*

* The author means the plague, which first began at Marseilles in France, and made terrible havock in that kingdom.

an ark to the saving of his house. And the best preparation is that, Micah v. 5. *This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian cometh into our land.* Their case was sad in Noah's days who were without the ark; so when the Lord's anger goes through a land, the case of those must be very sad who are out of Christ.

3dly, To stay our too eager pursuit after the world, and be content with little, and rather to be taken up about our souls, and how to be carried through in the evil day. Let us regard what Jeremiah said to Baruch, Jer. xlv. 5. *Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.*

4thly, To labour to settle matters, and keep them clear between God and you, that there be no standing controversy betwixt the Lord and you.

Fifthly, and lastly, Our days are evil, in respect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away. Our days are like those of Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 26. *Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.* The perfidious treachery and apostasy of the land from the covenanted work of reformation, the blood of the saints shed for the cause of God, with the oppressions, violence, and persecution on that score, are like the iniquity of Baal-peor, from which the land is not purged to this day. And this generation are serving themselves heirs to it, by the many pieces of defection fast carried on at this day. So that God seems to be about to reckon with the present generation for all together.

This calls to the redeeming of time, to be taking a back-look of the national controversies of old and of late, to be mourning over them, and the dishonour done to God by them; and to be preparing to meet the Lord in the way of his judgements.

I shall conclude all with another use, namely,

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USE II. Of reproof to two sorts of persons.

1. To those who go with the stream of the evil days, and are themselves following the profane and backsliding courses of the day, that make the time so evil. Alas! how many are there, who are drawing on wrath on themselves and on the land by their irreligion, profaneness, and apostasy from God? Let such consider,

(1.) How dangerous it is to be found among those who are in a conspiracy against God, to provoke his wrath against a land. When the flood of dishonour to God runs so high, those that join themselves in the sinful courses of the day, they not only have a hand in provoking God against themselves, but they are the Achans in the camp, the Jonahs in the ship, having a notable hand in bringing wrath on others too.

(2.) The higher one's hand is in a sinning time, the deeper may their share be expected to be in a time of suffering or calamity, when the Lord will appear to vindicate the glory of his name.

2. To those who weigh not the evil of the days, but live on carelessly, and are never stirred up to their duty thereby. They consider not how matters stand betwixt God and the generation. This is a common evil amongst us, and a sad evidence of the low state of religion at this day. O that such would be stirred up to consider their ways, and the grounds of the Lord's controversy with the generation. Awake, O sleeper, and call upon thy God, lest thou perish in the furious storm, which is likely to break out upon us. It is not a time to live at ease and unconcerned, when so many marks of the Lord's displeasure are so visible, that he who runs may read. Awake therefore, shake off thy sloth, and betake thyself to the Lord Jesus by faith, as the only means of thy escaping the wrath that is to come.

Passing.

Passing under the Rod, a Means of a
People's being brought into the Bond
of the Covenant.

A

S E R M O N

Preached on a Fast-day, at ETRICK, Thursday,
December 1. 1720.

EZEKIEL XX. 37.

*And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will
bring you into the bond of the covenant.*

IN these words we have a scheme of God's dispensation towards Israel, a people with whom he was angry, but had kindness for. In which we may observe,

1. A sharp trial threatened; *I will cause you to pass under the rod.* This rod is not to be understood of the king's rod or sceptre, but the shepherd's rod. God was the Shepherd of Israel, but they had strayed away from him. In the verse preceding this he tells them, that he would bring them together into the wilderness, and plead with them as he did with their fathers in that desert; and that the way he would treat them there, would be by causing them to pass under the rod. Compare Lev. xxvii. 32. The wilderness was Babylon, and the places about it, the place of their captivity. The rod was the seventy years captivity, and the hard treatment they met with during that period. The Lord tells them, that he would manage that matter as exactly as one

does in telling of sheep for teinding them; that he would make such a distinction and separation among them, as was made by the shepherd's rod, when the flock was teinded: in a word, that he would teind them, and the flock should go for it one way or other, but he would keep the teind to himself. Thus it was in the wilderness, where the body of that generation that came out of Egypt, fell, and never entered Canaan. Thus very few of them that went to Babylon came back, but either died or otherwise were left there. Compare vers. 38.

2. The happy issue of this trial to the remnant that won through; *I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.* This concerns the Lord's teind that fell to him by the whole passing under the rod. They had all slipt the bond of the covenant; their national idolatry had cut the very sinews of it: but God would make them willingly put their necks again under the sacred bond. And so it was prophesied they would do, Jer. l. 5. *Come, say they, and let us jain ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.* Compare Neh. ix. ult. *And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it.* See chap. x. 28.—39. And they adhered so firmly to this covenant, that they never after fell to idolatry.

The doctrine I observe from the words is,

DOCT. *Justice mixed with mercy towards a generation, to whom God's covenant is a burden, causes the treacherous generation to pass under a rod, destructive to many of them, trying to all of them, and so brings them back into the bond of the covenant.*

In England and Ireland, the bond of the covenant has lain among their feet trod upon these many years: In Scotland, church and state has loosed the bond, so that it is hanging down among our feet at
this

this day. There are three ways of God's dealing with such a generation.

1. The way of unmixed justice, laying the heavy curse of the covenant upon them, and either utterly destroying them that they shall be no people, or unchurching them that they shall be no people of God. Thus he dealt with the old world, Gen. vi. 13. *The end of all flesh is come before me;—and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.* And thus he threatened to do with the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5.—*I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* And it is well known, that this threatening has been awfully accomplished.

2. The way of unmixed mercy or sovereign grace, making wide steps over the iniquities of men, leaping over mountains, and melting them with love into repentance and reformation. Of this we have a remarkable instance, II. lvii. 17. 18. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on forwardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him, and to his mourners.* Sometimes the Lord takes that way, as Micah v. 7. *The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as the dew from the Lord, as the showens upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.* But this is more to be desired than hoped.

3. The way of justice mixed with mercy. This is the common road of providence, in which justice and mercy each act their part, and is the way in our text, and which we have ground to look for.

In discoursing further from this subject, I shall,

I. Shew, that this is the common method of providence in such a case.

II. What are those rods the Lord causeth such a generation to pass under.

III. How by such means a people are brought back into the bond of the covenant.

IV. Give the reasons of this dispensation.

V. Apply.

I. I shall shew, that this is the common method of providence in such a case. This appears,

1. From plain scripture-declarations of the mind of God in such a case, as Hag. ii. 7. *I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.* Shaking times go before reforming times. A hot furnace precedes the purifying of a drossy church, as II. i. 25. 26. *I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterwards thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.* See chap. iv. And we have a passage most pat to our purpose, Zech. xiii. 8. 9. *It shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off, and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.* This is a sweeping stroke carrying off the most part, a hard trial to those that are left, and the covenant renewed with them.

2. From scripture-instances. What heavy bondage did the Israelites suffer in Egypt, before God took them into the Sinai covenant? They met with a sweeping stroke in the wilderness, before they entered into Canaan. The temple was built, and they had glorious days, in Solomon's reign; but before that almost continual wars in David's time, famine for three years, and about the latter end of his reign seventy thousand were swept away by the pestilence. They had seventy years captivity before the building
of

of the second temple. And thus was accomplished that prediction, Micah vii. 12. 13. *In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortrefs even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate, because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.*

II. I shall shew what are those rods the Lord causeth such a people to pass under. The Lord has many rods for this purpose, and can make use of any or many of them together as he sees meet. I will name four of them.

1. A blasting curse upon the substance of a land, Hag. i. 9. *Ye looked for much, and lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.* God brings sometimes a generation of his anger into such a case, that nothing thrives with them which they take in hand, 2 Chron. xv. 5. 6. *In those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity.* This rod God is causing these lands to pass under at this day, whereby trade and credit are disturbed, and many ruined; and even wise men smart: for God can make the wise as well as fools pass under his rod, easier than a shepherd can run his sheep, when he has a mind. Alas! there is little to be had by plaistering over a tottering house ready to fall. The black bargain the nations have made between themselves, for which the bond of the covenant behaved to be broke asunder, and the horrible perjury and wickedness used among some trading men, may be plainly read in the present circumstances of the nations.

2. The sword, Lev. xxvi. 25. *I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant.* Many a time God has been threatening these perfidious nations with passing under this rod, and he
has

has given them of late several earnest of it: but it is to be feared, that what has happened of that kind is but an earnest of the bloody sword for these nations, that shall avenge the quarrel of the covenant. The Lord will not want instruments when he has a mind. He can hiss for the bee of Assyria out of the remotest parts, and ere he want, will set Manasseh against Ephraim, and Ephraim against Manasseh, and pull out the men of his anger, be they great or small, like sheep, and cause them pass under the rod.

3. Famine, Ezek. v. 16. *I will send upon them the evil arrows of famine.* This is a native consequent of the sword, and would soon be at the heels of it among us. See a terrible description of it, Lam. iv. 7. and downwards. Saul's murdering of the Gibeonites contrary to a covenant with them, brought three years famine on Israel, 2 Sam. xxi. 1. What may a nation expect then for murdering of men for their adherence to the nation's covenant with God himself? which is a crime that God has to lay to the charge of Scotland. We had an earnest of this too some years after the revolution, which made many a pale face, and laid many in the dust: but whatever is added to the controversy since, one may easily see the quarrel is not yet removed.

4. The pestilence, which has a frequent connection with the other two, Lev. xxvi. 25. *I will send the pestilence among you.—And when I have broken the staff of your bread, &c.* Ezek. v. 16. 17. *I will send upon them the evil arrows of famine,—and pestilence.* That is a desolating rod. It swept off at once among the Israelites fourteen thousand seven hundred men, Numb. xvi. 49. For David's numbering the people seventy thousand fell by it in one day. God is now avenging the dragooning in France, and their other cruelties upon the poor Protestants, by that dreadful visitation. And these nations have ground to fear it is coming that way to them, considering it has cast the

the abominable copy in much wickedness, which these lands have followed.

These are the rods which will be destructive to many, and trying to all who are caused to pass under them.

III. I shall shew how by such means a people are brought back into the bond of the covenant.

1. Such a passing under the rod, makes people apt to receive convictions of their unfaithfulness in the covenant. Hence says the Lord, *Hos. v. ult. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence; and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.* It is hard to convince men of their prosperous wickedness. In the time of God's patience, men will draw fair covers over their foul actions, eat, and wipe their mouths, and say, they have not sinned. But if God were risen up out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities, the heavy rod will extort confessions of guilt which one would not let light before. Every one is ready to blame another now, and lay the guilt off themselves: but such a day in Scotland would not leave a clean face among us all. Hence is that promise, *Ezek. vii. 16. They that escape of them, shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity.*

2. It would make men blithe to plead the privileges of the covenant, *Is. lxiii. 15. 16. Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer, thy name is from everlasting.* They that undervalue God's covenant now, being caused to pass under the rod, the weight of it would make them

them change their note; as it did to Israel, Psal. lxxviii. 34. 35. *When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.* The covenant with hell and death being rent asunder by the anger of God, and not being able to afford them any more security, they would be glad to catch hold of God's covenant, which they trod on before.

3. It would remove many a dead weight from off the covenant, both persons and things. For thus speaks the Lord to Israel, Ezek. xx. 38. *I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel.* Micah vii. 10. 11. forecited. Many a dead weight is lying at this day on the work of God in these nations, which there is no appearance of the removing of, till the Lord put to his own hand. But he can turn them off with a touch of his hand: for thus he addresses Israel, Ezek. xxxvii. 12. *Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.* Making the generation pass under the rod, he will either remove them out of the way, or render them inefficacious, that they shall not be able to stop a good work.

4. It would put an edge, by the blessing of the Lord, upon the spirits of the remnant, to take hold of the covenant, and press them on to it, as their necessary course in a day of distress: Jer. l. 5. *They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.* Compare Neh. ix. 36. 37. 38. *Behold, say the Israelites, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers, to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it. And it*
yieldeth

yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests seal unto it Ay, such a day would make men step over many impediments without ceremony, which they cannot get over in a day of ease. Necessity has no law, and need makes the naked run.

IV. I shall give the reasons of this dispensation. I only offer these three.

1. God takes this method, that he may thereby lay by many, whose eyes he will not let see the great things which he minds to do for his people and church, Ezek. xx. 38. forecited. The generation in the wilderness provoked him so, that he caused their carcases fall therein, before he brought the people into Canaan. There may be some whom God has a special controversy with, that he will have out of the way, before he make his glorious work appear, Amos ix. 10. *All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.*

2. That he may thereby purge away the dross of those whom he will make sharers of the glorious day, II. i. 25. 26. formerly cited. Like the three children, they must be cast into the fire, that their bonds may be burnt off them. They must feel the corrosives, before they get the cordial.

3. That he may awaken the generation to some sense of religion, and particularly bring in some elect ones yet walking in darkness, whom he will neither sweep away with the multitude, nor yet make witnesses of the glorious days in that case, Hos. ii. 6. 7. *Therefore behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake*

take them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.

V. I shall make some short improvement of this point.

1. This gives a sad prospect of the lot of this generation. It is true, God may deal with us in a way of sovereign grace: but sure we have ground to expect, in the common course of providence, a heavy day of passing under the rod. All have gone astray: we have the guilt of former times unremoved yet: the iniquities of the present times have gone over all the banks: the gospel is doing very little good. We are incorrigible under lesser strokes, and bring forth no fruit of deliverances, but that we grow worse daily. Immoralities are come to a prodigious height: and the generation is in a plain course of defection from God, in principles as well as practice. What can the end of these things be?

2. Yet it gives some ground of hope of better days on the other side of the stroke. Who knows but God may sanctify some national calamity or other to bring us back into the bond of the covenant, and yet make glorious days in these lands? We are not to desire the strokes of his hand; but if that be the Lord's mind concerning us to take that way with us, let us lay our hand on our mouth, and so steer our course that if possible we may get through.

But it may be inquired, What course should one take, in such a doubtful event, for his own safety? I answer,

1. Make up your peace with God in Christ, coming in personally into the bond of the covenant. In the worst of times this will make you safe, and set you beyond the reach of eternal wrath: For *there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*, Rom. viii. 1. And David, as it were in his last moments could say, *Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,*

want, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.

2. This being done, lay down yourself at the Lord's feet, resigning yourself to his disposal come what will; as David did in his distress, when flying from Jerusalem, on account of the unnatural rebellion of his son. Absalom: *Carry back the ark of God into the city, said he to Zadok the priest: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him,* 2 Sam. xv. 25. 26. They may perish in a common calamity, whose souls shall go straight to glory. We have no ground of doubting but many are in heaven this day, whom famine, sword, or pestilence have sent thither. Moses himself died in the wilderness, and was kept out of Canaan for his wilderness-provocation. Those who are in Christ, die they or live they, die what way they will, are safe.

3. But endeavour ye to be best when others are worst, and save yourselves from this untoward generation. Go not into the God-provoking courses of it, but repent and turn off from them in time. And mourn for the sins of others, and the dishonour done to God thereby. If there be any way to be safe in a time of common calamity, that is it. This was Noah's practice; for we are told, Gen. vi. 9. that *Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.* And this is clear from Ezek. ix.

4. *The Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.* If ye will partake with the generation of God's anger in their sinful loose ways, how can ye miss to partake with them in their plagues? But those who endeavour to walk with God in a sinning time, and to hold off from entering into the conspiracy, God will see to them in a suffering time.

An untoward Generation characterized,
with the Means to be saved from it.



S E R M O N

Preached at ETTICK, on a Fast-day, December 7.
1721.

ACTS ii. 40.

Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

THESE words are a part of the advice which Peter gives to his hearers, particularly to those of them who were convinced of their sin, and desired to know what course they should take to be saved. He bids them repent and be baptized, and return to the Lord by Jesus Christ. And to enforce this, he sets an encouragement before them, assuring them they should be welcome, ver. 39. *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* And he presses the necessity of it, as they tendered their own safety, and would not involve themselves in the ruin that was abiding the generation in which they lived; *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* In which words we may notice,

1. The character of the generation among whom their lot was cast; they were an *untoward generation*. They were a crooked, perverse, and froward set of men, who were not so much through weakness led out of the way, as through wickedness bent to forsake the way. They were wilful and headstrong in
their

their evil courses, and would not be reclaimed, but proceeded from evil to evil. He points out that generation as a signally-untoward one, *this untoward generation*, who have signalized themselves for obstinacy, rebellion, and apostasy, having crucified the Lord of life, and being still carrying on the war against him; being the generation which Moses specially pointed at, Deut. xxxii. 20. *They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.*

2. The lot abiding that generation, namely, ruin and misery, by the wrath of God breaking out on them, in as remarkable a manner as they had sinned. This is implied in that expression, *Save yourselves from them.* As if he had said, They are a generation of God's wrath, a generation devoted to destruction, engaged in a course that will have a fearful end. Our Lord had foretold it, Matth. xxii. 7. *But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.* Chap. xxiii. 35. 36. *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.* And accordingly it came to pass in the fearful destruction that was brought on them by the Romans.

3. The right course to be taken for safety in such a case, *Save yourselves, &c.* Partake not with them in their sins, that ye partake not with them in their plagues. The house is coming down, the breaking will come suddenly at an instant; *save yourselves*, flee for your life, that ye be not crushed with the fall thereof.

The text furnishes this doctrine, *viz.*

Doctr. *They that would see to their own safety, must bestir themselves, and timely save themselves from*

an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding.

I shall endeavour to prosecute this doctrine in the following method.

I. I shall shew what sort of a generation is an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding.

II. What course one must take that would save himself from such an untoward generation.

III. Lay down some motives to stir you up to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

I. I shall shew what sort of a generation is an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding. They are,

1. A generation become proof against the means of grace, the glorious gospel of Christ. Such was this generation in the text. Christ himself preached to them, and his apostles too: but how did they receive it? Hear the observation of the evangelist upon it, John xii. 37. 38. *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* And look to what the apostle Paul saith, Rom. x. 16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?* It is true, there were three thousand converted at this sermon of Peter's; but what were they and others that were picked up here and there by preventing grace, in comparison of the body of that generation, who remained obstinate infidels? They were but as a little remnant which God reserves to himself, in the worst of times, for a seed, Rom. ix. 29. So wrath came on that generation, as the apostle observes, 1 Thess. ii. 16. *Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost, according to the threatening, Matth. xxii. 7. forecited.*

And

And is not this the case of the present generation? We have long enjoyed the gospel, and we are as those who are rendered deaf by the continual sounding of many waters. To whom shall we now speak? who now believes the report of the gospel? They have sometimes trembled at the word, who now sit like brazen walls against it. Their consciences have been sometimes easily touched, which are now as seared with a hot iron. What can be expected; but that God will change his messengers, and try sharp rods after a slighted word?

2. A generation wherein corruption of life and manners is become universal, having overspread all ranks of persons. Thus was it with this generation in the text, wherein priests and people were all gone wrong. This was the character of the generation swept away with the flood, Gen. vi. 12. *God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.* When David considered his generation as such, how was his heart moved? Psal. xii. 1. 2. *Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips, and with a double heart do they speak. And behold his only comfort,* ver. 7. *Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.* When Micah saw his generation such, how does he lament the case! chap. vii. 1. 2. *Wo is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first ripe fruit. The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood: they hunt every man his brother with a net, &c. And see the course he resolves on ver. 7. Therefore I will look unto the Lord: I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.*

And alas! is not this our very case? Is not pro-

faneness and wickedness like a flood-gone over all its banks? If we look into the congregation, what profane swearing, drunkenness, biting and devouring one another, and uncleanness abound among us, in the midst of gospel-light! Is this the fruit of plenty, fulness, and thriving in the world? Take heed the day come not wherein the bodies thus abused to the dishonour of God, shall lie upon the face of the ground as dung, and there be none to bury them, whereof the plague has given the French nation a sad experience. If we look abroad through the nations, religion is truly fallen under contempt. Looseness and licentiousness is become fashionable, the flood-gates of debauchery are set open, and there is no stemming of the tide. And the generation has not stopt at ordinary crimes, ordinarily found among a corrupt people: but they have proceeded to an open defiance of Heaven, by Atheism and blasphemy. What prodigious blasphemies have been heard of, of late? The foundations of Christianity are sapt by damnable heresies. The power of religion has of a long time been very small; and now the principles of true religion are in hazard of being lost, not only among people, but pastors. What a dreadful conjuncture is this, wherein Arianism, the denying of the supreme Godhead of Christ, and his equality with the Father, is arisen amongst Dissenters in England and Ireland, and legalism, by which the purity of gospel-doctrine is corrupted, prevails, and is countenanced so much in Scotland at the same time? This universal corruption speaks us to be a generation of wrath.

3. A generation incorrigible, and deaf to all calls of providence, whom mercies draw not, and lesser strokes cannot drive to repentance. Hence the apostle addresses the Romans, chap. ii. 4. 5. *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent*

penitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God. And thus Jeremiah addresses the Jews, chap. v. 3. 9. *O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* This generation in the text had met with several lesser scourges before the fatal stroke came on them; they had the greatest of mercies conferred on them by the preaching of Christ and his apostles; and they got near to forty years space for repentance after they had crucified the Lord of glory: but they waxed worse and worse, instead of being bettered; and so wrath came on them to the uttermost.

And is it not so with us at this day? What a variety of providences has this generation been trysted with! How often since the revolution has all been in hazard, and yet our ruin has been mercifully prevented, God saying in effect as Hos. xi. 8. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.* How were the nations saved from imminent ruin as to all their sacred and civil interests, by King George's happy accession to the throne, when ready to be swallowed up by a Popish pretender! The nation was gently scourged by the rebellion, which God in his mercy put a stop to, that the whole land was not filled with blood, as that rebellion threatened. These lands have been much impoverished, by unhallowed projects set up to enrich them. We have been long threatened with the pestilence, raging in a neighbouring nation; yet God has hitherto avert-

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ed it. And what is the fruit of all these mercies, strokes, deliverances, and long-suffering? Are we bettered thereby? So far from it, that we are visibly growing worse and worse. One ill step is taken upon the back of another; so that causes of wrath are still multiplying, and the cup now fills so fast, that the measure of our fathers seems to be near the brim.

4. A generation impatient of cheek, control, or reproof, in their sinful courses, but bent to carry all before them. Such a one was that in the text. The followers of Christ witnessed against them; but what was the effect of it? They were cut to the heart thereby, instead of being pricked at the heart. They were enraged at them, instead of being reformed by them. And so they persecuted them, to fill up the measure of their cup. So the apostle speaks of the Jews at that time, *1 Thess. ii. 15. 16. Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins away.* There is hope of a person, or society, whatever their faults be, as long as they can bear to have their faults told them, and are willing to amend: but when once it comes to that, that *they hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly*, *Amos v. 10.* it is a sad sign of approaching ruin.

How evident is this in our case? Men cannot endure reproof. Well may we apply that to the hopeless case of this generation, *Hos. ix. 4. 5. Let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.* Church-discipline is contemned, private reproofs are apt to incense the reprovèd against the reprover, people generally being such men of Belial, that one needs
scarcely

scarcely speak to them of what is amiss in their way. And as to public ministerial reproofs in the preaching of the word, men are not able to bear them, if they touch them closely. Credit falsely so called, prevails in that case among all ranks more than conscience. What then can be expected, but that God will reach the generation such a reproof as they shall not get shifted?

II. I proceed to shew what course one must take, that would save himself from such an untoward generation.

More generally, he must open his eyes, and look, And,

1. He must look about him, and behold the face of the generation, and consider seriously the way they are going, and the untowardness therein appearing; otherwise he will never bestir himself to save himself from it. This has been the practice of the godly in all ages of declining from the good ways of the Lord. So did Noah, Heb. xi. 7. *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world.* And so did David, Psal. xii. 1. *Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.* And the neglect of this has been that which has led so many of the godly in all ages, into several steps of the way of the untoward generation. I never liked a public religion, that was all abroad, and nothing at home, taken up in censuring the faults of others, and putting the worst face on them, and in the mean time not humbling themselves and walking softly under their own. But certainly those whose lot it is to live in an untoward generation, had need to have their eyes in their head, and discern what corrupt courses tend to, that they may beware of them.

2. He must look above him unto God, and take notice, how the course of the untoward generation is displeasing

displeasing to him; how he is thereby dishonoured, and robbed of his glory, that is due to his name; how he is angry with the generation; and what signs of his wrath do appear, Psal. lxxix. 9. Hab. iii. 16. Matth. xvi. 3. God is the Governor of the world, and he is not an idle spectator of that which men do on earth: since he looks to us, let us look up to him.

3. He must look within him, and behold what untowardness is within his own heart, and appears in his own life and way, Is. vi. 5. Never man shall save himself from an untoward generation, that does not begin here. Here he must look, and behold how he is in danger of being led aside into the way of the untoward generation, by reason of the blindness of mind, and untowardness of heart and affections within his own breast.

More particularly, if you would save yourselves from an untoward generation,

1. Return unto God by Jesus Christ, in the way of the everlasting covenant held out to you in the gospel: *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call*, Acts ii. 39. Be no longer stiff-necked, but yield yourselves to the Lord. Take salvation closely to heart now at length, and enter into the covenant, ye that are yet strangers to Christ. And renew your covenant, ye that are the friends of Christ, give a new solemn consent to the marriage-covenant betwixt Christ and your souls. And I would advise both to do this, with a particular view to your being saved from this untoward generation. Sirs, we seem to be entering into a cloud, and darkness seems to be coming on: take hold of Christ for your guide in time, lest ye be wrapt up in the cloud without a guide, and there be a sad account of you, and such as you are, ere the darkness be over.

2. Endeavour close walking with God in your personal capacity, as did Noah, Gen. vi. 9. forecited. Strive to be acquainted with religion in the life and power.

power of it on your own souls. In a dark and cloudy day upon the church, it is hard to keep fast an unfelt religion. When the winds of error and delusion are left to blow, the earth, sea, and trees, there is a sad account of them, Rev. vii. 3. And in a time of common calamity, one that cannot live by faith, will find it hard to live.

3. Beware of and stand at a distance from the sinful ways and courses of the untoward generation: Eph. v. 11. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* They that will partake of their sins, must lay their account to partake of their plagues also, when God riseth up to plead his controversy. Let it not encourage you to sin, that you see others generally take a liberty to themselves that way; for by that means you enter into the conspiracy against God with the multitude, and shall smart with them. If ever you save yourselves from this untoward generation, you will be instructed of God as he was, that he *should not walk in the way of this people*, Is. viii. 11.

4. Mourn over the sins of the untoward generation, as well as over your own, otherwise ye are not free of them, Ezek. ix. 4. forecited. Psal. cxix. 136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes*, said David; *because they* (the wicked) *keep not thy law.* Alas! this public spirit is much gone in our day. God is dishonoured, his name is profaned, his ways, truths, and ordinances are trampled upon by an untoward generation; and we stand by as unconcerned spectators, or else join in the affronting of him. Ah! is God our Father? is Christ our elder brother? are we on Heaven's side? and can we be thus hale-hearted in such a case?

5. Lastly, Take home Zion's case into your own soul; and be concerned how it shall fare with the church and interest of Christ in this untoward generation. There has been much contending in Scotland even unto blood for all the parts of our cove-
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nanted reformation. Few of that generation are to the fore now; but we are arisen a new generation that knew not Joseph, and it is like to go to wreck among our hands. And it is much to be lamented, that professors generally are very easy and secure upon the matter. They see not the danger, they perceive not the weight of the thing, and they will not inquire into it. And hence no wonder, that they are not employed to wrestle with God upon it. But this is a day, that calls you to bestir yourselves on Zion's behalf, and inquire into and inform yourselves of her true interests, and the weight of them which are at stake; lest ye lay yourselves open to that, Amos vi. 1. *Wo to them that are at ease in Zion.* Our Lord takes notice how men carry themselves in a time of his interest sinking, and will see to it himself in due time; but their case is dangerous who stand aloof from it, according to what Mordecai told Esther, chap. iv. 14. *For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed.*

III. I shall conclude with some motives to stir you up to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

1. The danger of this untoward generation is very great; Amos iii. 2. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* For the debt of sin they have entered heirs to, the breach of covenant with God, the blood of the saints, and apostasy of the late times, is very great and hainous. The multiplied causes of God's controversy, since the Lord returned the captivity of this church, are very many and of a deep die. And the stroke has been long threatened, and of divers kinds, sword, famine, and pestilence. So that, in the ordinary course of providence it cannot miss to be of extreme weight when it comes.

2. It seems to be making haste, and to be very near,

near, Deut. xxxii. 35. *Their foot shall slide in due time : for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.* For we see that God is risen up from his place, to punish the nations for their iniquity, in the pestilence that has so long raged abroad. It is time for us to bestir ourselves to save ourselves from this untoward generation, when our neighbours house is on fire. Besides, this untoward generation are visibly mending their pace in departing from God, and are making still quicker and quicker dispatch in filling up the cup of our iniquity. And as natural motions increase the more, the nearer they draw to the centre ; so the nearer nations are to the fatal day of wrath, they make the greater speed in pulling it down on themselves. And finally, our divisions speak it to be so : *A house divided against itself cannot stand.*

3. Lastly, Now is the time to save yourselves. God is yet on a throne of grace. He is calling to you, however far ye have gone on with the untoward generation, now to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Israel's Sin and Judgement, with regard to abused Mercies, described.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at ETTRICK, November 7. 1725.

HOSEA ii. 8. 9.

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver, and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.

IN these words we have Israel's sin and judgement.

I. Israel's sin, want of knowledge; a sin, though but a want. Men must reckon to God for the gifts and graces they want, which they are obliged to have, and may have. A heart-sin: the sins of the heart, as well as those of the life, are ruining; and a dark heart, as well as a heart rebelling against the light, is dangerous. In Israel's sin observe two things.

1. The object they did not know. In a word, the divine bounty. God had been very kind to them, but they had taken no knowledge of all his kindness: they were more brutish than the ox or ass, *Is. i. 3.* Observe,

(1.) The good things he had furnished them with; and first for the body. [1.] Necessaries, *corn*, whereof their bread was made, usually put for all necessities.

ries. He had watched over the seasons, from the time it was sown, till it was gathered in. [2.] Conveniencies; for delights, *wine*; he blessed their vintage. For ornament, *oil*, that makes the face to shine, and which was usual in their feasts, Psal. xxiii. Secondly, for the purse and coffer. 1st, A variety of coin of the best, *silver and gold*. 2^{dly}, He made it increase, *Heb.* He blessed them in trade, they flourished in it; the produce of their country did thrive, and brought in to them good prices for their commodities; so that they were a rich people. Thus they were in the reign of Jeroboam the Second, the most flourishing time they ever had, 2 Kings xiv. But what did they with it? They prepared it for their idol; they dressed Baal's image with it.

(2.) On what terms they were thus furnished; on free cost their country was nourished, God gave them these things freely. They had them by free gift.

(3.) His liberality. They said, ver. 5. their idols gave them bread. Suppose it had been so, God gave them corn, that was more. Their idols gave them water, but God gave them wine. And he added silver and gold, of which there is no mention in that verse. So God had been kinder to them than their idols.

2. How they did not know this; *For*, *Heb. And*. It is joined with ver. 5. *She hath played the harlot, done shamefully, and did not know*. They laid it not to heart, and practised accordingly, to serve and honour God with his own good gifts, but served their own lusts and idols with them, and dishonoured him thereby. Thus, though they knew that God gave them these things, in a general superficial way, God reckons they did not know.

II. Israel's judgement; which is proposed,

1. More generally. Where we have, (1.) The heavy turn brought on their condition, *I will return, i. e.* change the way of my dispensation to them. As if he had said, Whereas ye had both neces-

saries and conveniencies for the body, I will strip you of them both. Your purses that were filled, I will empty them again; your trade that flourished, I will blast, and ye shall go as fast down as ever ye rose. Ye shall have few pennyworths, and what ye have ye shall get little for them. (2.) The reason of it, *therefore*. God will not change his kind way with a people, but for good reason: so when we see it so with us, let us satisfy ourselves, that there is a cause; and justify God in the blackest turn of our lot. In this *therefore*,

1st, There is judgement and indignation. It refers to their sin, ver. 8. *They knew not that I gave them: therefore I will return, and take them away.* They have made an ill use of their plentiful provision; therefore I will draw their table, and bind them up to short commons.

2^{dly}, There is mercy and love in it. It refers also to ver. 6. 7. God shews there he had a design of love on them, to have them back to himself. That they may be made to return, *therefore I will return*: their plenty has been their snare, therefore I will take it from them, that I may win them back again.

2. More particularly. He threatens that he will leave them neither in them, nor on them; but strip them of all. And,

1st, Of their maintenance; where observe, (1.) He asserts his property in their corn and wine: The corn they have is my corn, the wine my wine, though ye call it yours, ver. 5. Though ye have sown the corn, and planted the vines; and they are come forward to the time of eating and drinking of them. (2.) He threatens to seize them accordingly as his own, *I will take away my corn, &c.* And who can quarrel his taking away his own? (3.) The timing of the stroke. He will let alone the corn till it be come to the hook, yea till it be for leading in, and then he will come and take it away in the time thereof, when nothing remains but for the husbandman to enjoy

joy the fruit of his labour. So he will take away the wine in its season, when it is just ready for the press.

2dly, Of their cloathing. Where observe, (1.) His property in the wool and lint. (2.) For what end he gave them them. (3.) How he will take them away; recover them as out of the hand of enemies, wrongous possessors, that sed their lusts with them, but they shall not have them to cover their nakedness.

Therefore I will return, and take away my corn—and my wine—.

Three doctrines may be observed from these words.

DOCT. I. *God will certainly change his way with prosperous impenitent sinners.*

DOCT. II. *God's taking away the corn, and depriving men of the use of necessaries, is the just reward of the abuse of plenty.*

DOCT. III. *God may have a design of love in taking away his corn from a sinful people, and depriving them of such necessary mercies and comforts of life.*

I shall explain each of these doctrines, and apply them in order.

DOCT. I. *God will certainly change his way with prosperous impenitent sinners: Therefore I will return.* They may prosper for a while; but if they return not in the way of duty to God, God will return in the change of his dispensation to them, making their sun to go down at noon-day with them.

The reasons of this dispensation are,

1. God's honour requires it, *Psal. E 2r. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.* He has tried them with prosperity, and that will not do; he will vindicate his own honour, by taking a

contrary course, that all the world may see he does not approve their way.

2. It is necessary to put a stop to their progress in wickedness. Wicked men, the more prosperous they are, the more vile they grow; like a dunghill, the hotter the sun shines on it, the ranker does it smell. Prosperity to them is as the wind to the seas; the stronger it blows, the waves rage the more: therefore he will bound it.

USE. I. Let not prosperity make you forget God, yourselves, and duty; and trust not in the uncertain smiles of the world. For the frowns may yet be as heavy, as ever the smiles were pleasant, and things may go as fast wrong as ever they went right.

2. Let no body envy prosperous wickedness, Psal. xxxvii. 1. *Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.* It has put good men fore to it, to see despisers of God and godliness carested by outward providence. But look to the word, and see the end; that will be bitter, Psal. lxxiii. 17. 18.

DOCT. II. *God's taking away the corn, and depriving men of the use of necessaries, is the just reward of the abuse of plenty.* This will appear, if ye consider,

1. That God is a God delighting in mercy, and does not willingly afflict, Lam. iii. 33. There is no delight in the misery of his creatures to him, Ezek. xviii. 23. Justice is his act indeed, but his strange act. It is with a kind of reluctancy that he reaches a stroke to his people, Hos. xi. 8.

2. He has promised the contrary course to his people walking in his ways, Hos. ii. 21. 22. *And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel.* It is a general promise, *To him that hath shall be given, i. e.*

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The honouring of God with what we have is the way to get more; Prov. iii. 9. 10. *Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

Object. But do not even the godly tender ones smart in such a case? *Ans.* Indeed common calamities on a land or country do not just select the ungodly, and keep off from godly tender Christians: yet the latter have the advantage. There is as much guilt on the best, even of abuse of mercies, as will justify God in reaching them a share of the common calamity: but they shall get it moderated and sanctified, and God will bring good out of it to them, Psal. xxxvii. 19. *They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.* Ver. 3. *Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.* Noah's house and land was overflowed with the flood, but God provided him an ark. Jeremiah and his remnant were to fall into the enemy's hand, but the Lord said to him, *Verily it shall be well with thy remnant, verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction,* Jer. xv. 11.

3. He has threatened to punish the abuse of plenty with the want of necessaries, Deut. xxviii. 47. 48. *Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things: therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.* Thus he dealt with a sinning people, Amos iv. 6. *I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your palaces.* The sins of a people in a foregoing time, often bring the harvest to a sorry account, Is. xvi. 9. *Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer, the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears*

O Hebbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer-fruits, and for thy harvest, is fallen. Chap. xvii. 11. In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow. And as we hear from the word, so we see it with our eyes at this day.

Object. But these things fall out of course; and there have been bad seasons before this, and will be after. *Ans.* There has so; but I know no body who pretends to have seen such a long and fore course of it at once. Howbeit God has the management of all, and known to him are all things from the beginning; and he has so ordered the course of nature, as to serve the purpose of fulfilling his word thereby: so that wind and rain are all let out by his order for that end, Job xxxvii. 12. 13.

Lastly, It is the taking away from sinners that which they have used to the dishonour of God; and who sees not that to be most just? The corn is the Lord's; it is given to the children of men, that they may be thereby strengthened to serve the Giver; and instead of that they serve their lusts with it.

USE. Let this serve,

1. To convince us of our abuse of former mercies, being the cause of this heavy stroke in the case of the harvest. There have been good years; but what wonder the Lord return, considering the unfruitfulness under the gospel, abuse of God's good creatures, carnality and worldliness, &c.?

2. To humble us, as a people against whom the Lord is thus testifying his displeasure, as against abusers of his goodness.

3. To put us to justify God, and not to fret. He is just in all that he has done; for we have sinned.

Lastly, To stir us up to repentance, to turn to a smiting God; that we be not as those who refuse correction.

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DOCT. III. *God may have a design of love in taking away his corn from a sinful people, and depriving them of such necessary mercies and comforts of life.*

1. In the general, that design is to cause them to return to the Lord the first Husband. When the Lord was to bring back Israel to himself from her adulterous departures, she is straitened in her provisions, Hof. iii. 2. 3. The straits which the prodigal met with abroad, occasioned his coming home, Luke xv. And this stroke is a call to us to return to our God.

2. More particularly, we may conceive that design to be,

(1.) To teach sinners dependence on God in their affairs of life, Psal. cxxvii. 1. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.* Men may plough, and sow, and be at all pains, and yet not be secure of the crop: for God can make the harvest a heap. Therefore learn that it is the Lord, and not your wit and industry, that gives power to get wealth.

(2.) To cut off from them fuel for their lusts, Hof. ii. 6. *I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.* Abundance has been a snare to many. And the best have so little skill to guide wealth, that it is God's goodness to many, they are held short by the head. We are often with the comforts of the world, like a child playing himself with a knife: he weeps as herried, when it is taken away; but it is the father's kindness to the child, that he will not let him keep it.

3. To bring them to be more about the throne of grace by prayer, and to live more by faith. When the streams run full, and there is wealth in the cisterns, we are apt to forget the fountain: so God dries up the streams, gives one cistern a crack after another, and it runs out, and then the soul comes away to God for all, Zeph. iii. 12. *I will leave in*
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the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. 1 Tim. v. 5. So their souls prosper, though the world prospers not with them; while the prosperity of others destroys their souls.

4. To enrich them another way, Rom. v. 3. 4. 5. *Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed.* The wilderness-lot is oft-times the most profitable part of the Christian's lot in the world. The most pathetic moving psalms of David were penned on such occasions. The wilderness is often God's closet, which he takes his people into, Hof. ii. 14. *I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her, or to her heart.* And some sharp trial is the signal given them to come into the closet. The Lord brings them into straits, that he may have occasion to shew them his love in seasonable reliefs, and that he may entertain them with the sweet of the promises framed for their lot.

USE. 1. Entertain kindly thoughts of the dispensations of this day, in the Lord's so far taking away the corn. The patient believes that the physician, in opening a vein and taking away so much blood, and in administering a bitter potion of physic to him, has no ill design on him: the toward child believes the father means no ill, but good to him, in correcting him. Why should we entertain harsh thoughts of God, in his taking away outward comforts of life? Surely he sees need for it. Without these kindly thoughts of the divine providence, there is no good of the trial.

2. Comply with the kind design of providence. Learn dependence on God, mortify your lusts, live by faith, and see to make spiritual advantage of the dispensation. Return to God who smiteth, and humble yourselves under his mighty hand: and if

ye be losers one way, ye will be sure to be gainers another.

Lastly, Rejoice in the Lord, when the creatures fail. This was Habakkuk's exercise, and it ought to be yours, chap. iii. 17. 18. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.

I will take away—in the time thereof—in the season thereof.

DOCT. God often sees it meet to take away temporal mercies, just when they are brought to the point of enjoyment. As if one should cause the bread to fall out of one's hand, when he is just putting it in his mouth. Remarkable to this purpose is Hos. ix. 2. *The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.* Thus has he done in our case. He does it,

Reas. 1. To make the trial strike the more home, Job xx. 22. *In the fulness of his sufficiency, he shall be in straits.* The higher mens hopes are lifted up, the more piercing is the disappointment. Secure sinners need a sharp awakening, and God points afflictions this way, that they may be the more rousing. The more the mercy is ripened, the loss is the forer, and the trial the greater.

2. To teach us that we are always in his reverence, and all we have is at all times in his hand, Hos. ix. 11. 12. *As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird; from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them that there shall not be a man left: yea, wo also unto them when I depart from them.* What we have we can sometimes put out

out of the reach of men our enemies : but nothing we have can we put out of God's reach. Therefore there is as much need of dependence on God, for the corn when it comes to the hook, as when it is sown at first.

3. To punish mens carnal confidence upon fair appearances. When the creature blooms fair, men promise themselves mighty things on the head of it, without dependence on God : and then a jealous God strikes it down therefore in his wrath, Luke xii. 20. *Thou fool, said God unto the rich man, this night thy soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?* This is applicable to the affair of the blasted crop. It may bud and blossom fair whose fruit may be blasted, Hos. viii. 7. *They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind : it hath no stalk : the bud shall yield no meal : if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.*

Lastly, There may be some new provocation, between the first appearance and bringing of the mercy to perfection, which may procure a turn of the wheel of providence. Hence said the Lord to Eli, 1 Sam. ii. 30. *I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever : but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me ; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.* O how often do we by our miscarriages stop the course of our mercies ! Things go favourably a while : but when men forget God, and forget themselves, God is provoked to give a backward cast.

USE. 1. See here the uncertainty of all temporal things. One is never sure of them ; there is not one stage of all the way they come to us, but they may fall in it, and never rise again, Hos. ix. 11. fore-cited. In the bud, blossom, and fruit too, they are liable to blasting. When they are at their full, they may suddenly suffer an eclipse.

2. Be

2. Be not secure when the world smiles: though it smile this moment, it may look sour the next. In the midst of its triumphs one may be knocked down. Therefore rejoice with trembling: for often when affliction seems farthest-off, the hand is only lifted back to fetch the greater stroke; Job xxi. 13. *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.*

3. How much more desirable and valuable are the spiritual mercies of peace with God, pardon, and eternal life? These are things one may be sure of; the world cannot take them away, and God will not; *For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*; Rom. xi. 29. Temporal mercies are a crown that common providence may set on with its hand to-day, and kick off with its foot to-morrow. But spiritual privileges are liable to no such uncertainties, Matth. vi. 19. 20. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*

4. Let not God's people lose their hope and confidence in God for a delivery, when their case is even come to an extremity. There is a counter-part of this dispensation, which the people of God often meet with, Deut. xxxii. 36. *For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none stout up, or left.* It is as easy for God to turn the wheel of providence the one way as the other; to make night day, as day night; to make the sun arise at midnight, as to go down at mid-day, Zech. xiv.

7.

Lastly, Sit loose to the world: neither be cast down with its frowns, nor lifted up with its smiles; but lay your weight on Christ, trusting in him alone for all things.

I will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.

DOCT. *God's taking away outward mercies from the abusers of them, is a recovering them out of their hand.*

1. It imports, that they have forfeited their right to them, and are in a sense violent possessors of them; that a stronger than they must recover them out of their hands. Wicked men have no covenant-right to the creatures: but God gives them a providential right to them; and even that they forfeit before the Lord by their abuse of them.

2. The creatures are unwillingly detained by them, and groan to be recovered out of their hands, Rom. viii. 20. 21. The creatures were made for the honour of God, but wicked men use them as instruments to dishonour God with: therefore they groan as captives and prisoners to be delivered out of their hands. Their corn groans from their fields and barns, their drink from their cups, their silver and gold from their pockets, for that they should be used for the maintenance of their lusts: and the godly express their groans as the mouth of the creation, Rom. viii. 22. 23. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now: and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

3. Abused mercies are still the Lord's; let men use them as they will, God has not given up his property in them: *My corn, wool, &c.* Men are apt to think that they may do with their own what they will: but mind, nothing is yours, but in subordination to God. And therefore ye must give account to God how ye dispose of every measure of your corn, and cup of your drink, every penny of your silver and gold: and as much of these as has
been

been laid out in the service of your lusts, ye shall be made to suffer for, as unjust stewards that have wasted your Master's goods.

Lastly, He will take them in again to his own hand, to dispose of them another way. They are never out of his reach: he can strip those of them in life, make wings to them, and cause them fly away, and leave them nothing, who sometimes had an affluence of all things, whereof every age affords many instances. He will surely strip them of them at death, and hasten on their dying day, for to recover his mercies out of their hands, Jer. xvii. 11. *As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not: so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.*

USE. Let abusers of God's goodness hold as fast as they can, their abused mercies will be sure to leave them, leaving a sting behind them. Since God takes it on him to recover them, he will do it effectually at length: and since he will take them from them, by way of recovery, there is a piercing sting that the removal will leave behind it. The rich man in hell had not a drop of water to cool his tongue: the wine he drank plentifully in his faring deliciously every day, made this the more bitter. It is not so with the godly losing their creature-comforts in the midst of their sober use of them, as Job vi. 13.

For she did not know that I gave her corn, &c.

DOCT. God takes it vainously that men should not know and consider themselves to be his debtors for their meat, drink, and money, but should lay them out on their lusts and idols.

This imports these things.

1. Men need these things, in this their imperfect state in this world. Therefore we are taught to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread.* In heaven the saints

will need none of them : in hell they will not get a drop of water, however much they need it. Here we must have meat and drink for the support of our bodies : and money is necessary for conveniency of life, Eccl. x. 19. *Money answereth all things.*

2. God is the giver of them, the meat, the drink, the money. They are all his. So the text, *My corn, my wine, &c.* Hag. ii. 8. *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.* And he gives them to whom, and in what measure he sees good, James i. 17. *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* Though men earn them by their labour and industry, though they be left them by parents or other friends ; God is still the giver, as being the first cause, without whom all other could do nothing.

3. God requires men to consider themselves as his debtors for all, and to behave themselves accordingly, using them all for his honour. This is the burden he affects his gifts with, Prov. iii. 9. *Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase.* And according as he gives, so he requires a proportionable improvement, Luke xix. 13. *Occupy till I come.* The more liberally God bestows on any, the more are they obliged to be useful for God, Luke xii. 48. *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.*

4. Notwithstanding corrupt men bestow God's good gifts on their lusts, James iv. 3. By these they feed them, protect and defend them, against God and his holy law. The meat, drink, and money, are employed that way. One feeds with them a lust of gluttony, another that of drunkenness, another a lust of pride and vanity. Many that have the greatest abundance of them spend them on harlots. So by this means they proclaim war against God, and carry it on against him with weapons got out of his own magazine, James iv. 4.

5. It is owing to mens not considering that they
are

are God's debtors for these things, that they dare venture to bestow them on their lusts. If they laid to heart their dependence on him for all they have, they would not dare to use them to the dishonour of the giver; knowing that he whose plenty they abuse, can soon bring them to the lack of necessaries.

6. Lastly, This is highly provoking in the sight of God. We can make him no recompense for his mercies, but shall we not acknowledge the receipt of them? What he gives us for our necessity and conveniency, shall we use to the dishonour of his name? *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?* Deut. xxxii. 6.

USE. 1. See here the true cause of the present stroke; how trade comes to be so low, money scarce, and the corns many of them so far ruined. We have not known that God gave us corn, and wine, and oil, &c.

2. Be warned then to consider, that ye are God's debtors for your meat, drink, and money; and, under the pain of God's high displeasure, cease to consume them on your lusts. Provoke him not to jealousy, as if ye were stronger than he: for there will be a bitter reckoning for mercies so abused.

God's Dispensations towards a froward Generation described.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at ETRICK, March 13. 1728, on a Fast-day appointed by the Presbytery of Selkirk.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 20.

And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

THIS song, after the introduction, ver. 1.—6. sets forth God's special favours to Israel in ancient and later times, ver. 7.—14. Israel's ingratitude to and apostasy from God, ver. 15.—18. He instances particularly in their sensuality and idolatry. Then follows God's just resentment of their apostasy. Instead of delighting in them, he disdains them; instead of his former favours to them, he will turn away from them and leave them.

In the words we have two things.

1. A resolution taken in heaven against them, *And he said, I will hide my face from them*; and what God says must stand, he will not unsay it again. And two things he is resolved on against them.

(1.) That he *will hide his face from them*, Heb. *cause to hide*, pointing at a vail he would draw between him and them, which they should not be able to remove. His hiding his face from them, is the withdrawing of the tokens of his favour, and his refusing

fusing them his countenance, as one wroth with them.

(2.) That he would *see* and observe *what their end or latter part would be*. The former part of their time had been a time of much kindness shewn to them from God, and base ingratitude to God in them. Now he resolves to withdraw his favours, let them alone, and see what they will make of the latter part, and proceed with them accordingly.

2. The reasons justifying this resolution.

(1.) They were a *froward generation*, very froward, a generation of perversenesses; whatever way God would draw them, they would still turn the contrary, and would not be managed.

(2.) They were a faithless generation; though children, and sons, by an external federal adoption, there was no trustiness in them; they would say and unsay, no ties would bind them; they were false and fickle, and still played fast and loose. The first reason seems specially to relate to the first part of the resolution; and the second to the second part of it.

We may take up the substance of these words in four points of doctrine.

DOCT. I. *It may be the just character of a generation of the church, that they are a very froward generation.*

DOCT. II. *A holy God will hide his face from a froward generation.*

DOCT. III. *God, hiding his face from a froward generation, waits to see what issue they will bring it to, that he may take course with them accordingly.*

DOCT. IV. *What provokes God to deal thus with a generation, is their being children in whom is no faith, men professing the true religion, and yet so false as that they are not to be trusted.*

I shall endeavour to explain and apply each of these doctrines in order.

DOCT. I.

DOCT. I. *It may be the just character of a generation of the church, that they are a very froward generation.* This is the just character,

1. Of a generation deaf to the calls of the word, not to be wrought upon by the offers of the gospel, nor the terrors of the law, Matth. xi. 17. God calls sinners to turn from their sin, holding out the arms of his mercy to embrace them; stretching out the flaming sword of his justice to fright them; the one in the gospel-promises, the other in the law-threatenings. But they go on frowardly.

2. An incorrigible generation, whom the kindness of God in his providence to them will not draw to repentance, and who go on wilfully in their sinful courses over the belly of correction, and the rebukes of providence they meet with, Rom. ii. 4. *Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* Jer. v. 3. *Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.* In the one, sinners despise his favour; in the other, they defy his feud. Let him say and do what he will to them, they will have their swing, cost what it will, Jer. ii. 25. *I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.*

3. A generation impatient of check and control, Hof. iv. 4. *Let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.* They scorn to be hedged in within the bounds set them by the law of God: the more they are striven against, the more do their lusts rage, the more are their corruptions irritated. To offer to dam them up, is to provoke them in effect to go from evil to worse: their wickedness comes down like an overflowing flood.

4. A generation turning its edge against truth and holiness; being set not only to take their will in their

own courses, but to run down religion, and what has the stamp of divine approbation on it, Luke xi. 52. *Wo unto you, lawyers: for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered.* Not only they will not be managed themselves by the divine counsel, but they wage war against truth and seriousness, that they may get them driven out from the generation.

USE. And is not this the just character of the present generation? How fruitless is the preaching of the gospel among us? how little valued are the terrors of the law? The kind casts of providence in signal deliverances, the awful rebukes of providence which the land and particular persons have smarted under, are both neglected. The generation in church and state, in congregations and families, are past striving with in hopes of any amendment, Hos. iv. 4. foretold. Secret sighing and mourning over the case before the Lord, is the great thing that is left for Zion's mourners, Jer. xiii. 17. *But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears.* And truth and holiness is run down with error and profaneness. The precious truths of the gospel are reproached and despised; and while there is an inundation of immorality in practice, there is a bringing in a Christless morality in doctrine, instead of the glorious gospel of the grace of God. What is to be expected of these things? Why,

DOCT. II. *A holy God will hide his face from a froward generation.* This speaks two things.

1. God's displeasure with such a generation, Is. lvii. 17. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.* However they may be pleased with themselves and their own condition, God is highly displeased with them; and

and they will find it to their cost at long-run. A froward generation is a generation of God's wrath. Men may put fair colours on their apostasy, to bring themselves and others into a liking of their courses; but God will not be mocked.

2. God's disdain and loathing of such a generation, Deut. xxxii. 19. 20. *And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will bide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.* Sinners pride themselves in their abominations, as if they would cope with heaven; but God disdains them as contemptible wretches, whom he can in a moment crush in pieces. They please themselves wallowing in the mire of their course of apostasy; but God loaths them as abominable in his eyes.

And it imports two things.

1. His withdrawing the former tokens of his favour from them; the light of his countenance that sometimes shined, goes down on them; and the heavens lour on them, however earth may smile, Jer. xv. 9. *She that hath born seven, languisheth: she hath given up the ghost, her sun is gone down while it was yet day.* Heaven's favour and smiles put a crown on the head of a generation; but a froward generation, ungrateful for them, provokes God to put a stop to the course of them.

2. His turning his back on them, departing, and forsaking them. A froward generation first turns their back on God, neglecting to walk in his ways, Jer. ii. 27. *They have turned their back unto me, and not their face;* and then God pays them home in their own coin, turning his back on them, Jer. xviii. 17. *I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.* So that they have not the access to him which they sometimes had; nor does he appear for them, as sometimes he did.

USE. Is not this the very case we are in at this day,

day, with respect to heaven? God has hid his face from the generation. He is evidently displeased with us, and loaths us. Where are the former tokens of his favour and presence among us? Look to ordinances, and our dead and lifeless assemblies; look to the several corners of the land, and the name of the whole may be *Ichabod, for the glory is departed*. It has been these many years a-departing, and grows always less and less, departing farther and farther. And this brings me to,

DOCT. III. *God, hiding his face from a froward generation, waits to see what issue they will bring it to, that he may take course with them accordingly. I will see what their end will be.*

This is a very heavy word, and implies three things.

1. God will give them head. They are froward, and will not be managed by him; he will not strive with them as he has done, but he will give them head to take their course, and follow their mark, as he did with Israel of old, *Psal. lxxxi. 11. 12. My people would not hearken to my voice: and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts lust: and they walked in their own counsels.* The farther sinners go in apostasy from God, they find their way the plainer, and not so many rubs in it as they met with at the first.

2. He will narrowly mark every step which they take, when they have gotten their will, though he do not presently tell them of it, nor strive with them to hold them in, *Amos viii. 7. The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.* They could not endure his being a monitor, and a reprover to them: he will let it alone, and be only a spectator, but not an idle spectator, but one that will lay up every article in order to count and reckoning in due time, *Deut. xxxii. 34. 35. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed*

sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense, their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

3. They will bring the matter at that rate to a miserable issue, *Is. lvii. 17.* forecited. They will go from evil to worse. And so they did, till they crucified the Lord of glory, persecuted his followers, and turned downright blasphemers, and God rejected them and cut them off, *Deut. xxxii. 21.* *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people, I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.* Thus sinners, having provoked God to give them head, go on to such a pitch of apostasy and wickedness, as will justify before all the most severe proceedings against them.

USE. Alas! this seems to be too like to be the case of this church and land at this day, and of many particular persons in it. In former generations the Lord held his church short by the head: and because they could never hold right long, they got no long rest ordinarily, but were thrown into the furnace to purge them. But now the rest which this generation has got, is near on the borders of forty years; and we have been long going wrong, and still our peace is preserved; and always the longer the farther, and the case the more hopeless. So it looks as if God, having given the generation head, were even seeing what issue they will bring it to: And if it be so, God pity them that will live to see the end of it; for it will be dreadful first in the pitch that the apostasy will be brought to, and the judgment which will follow it. And so will it be in the case of particular persons.

DOCT. IV. *What provokes God to deal thus with a generation, is their being children in whom is no faith,*

faith, men professing the true religion, and yet so false as that they are not to be trusted. This we may take up in these two things.

1. Their being men who cannot be bound to their duty by the most solemn and sacred engagements, but say, *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us,* Psal. ii. 3.

2. Persons who, in their professions of duty which they make, lie to God and man, will say well at a time, but in practice do not mind nor regard what they so said; Jer. ii. 20. *Thou saidst, I will not transgress: when upon every high hill, and under every green tree thou wandereft, playing the harlot.*

USE. Now whether God is seeing what our end will be, sure this is the case of this generation, *children in whom is no faith.* Our solemn national covenants with God, the conscience of them is generally worn out at this day, and the sacred ties of them are felt by very few, the sense of them being deadened by contrary practices, laws, and oaths. Sacramental engagements to duty in our baptism and at the Lord's table, are too weak to bind most of those that have taken them on to a tolerable Christian walk; but they carry as if they had been engaged to serve the devil, the world, and the flesh. And with many marriage is but a jest, and their marriage-vows are to them but as ropes of sand, whence these lands are filled with vile adulteries. Men profess to know God, but in works they deny him. There is no truth left among men, and common honesty is turned rare. There is no trusting of mens words or protestations, and hardly their oaths. The master cannot trust the servant; nor can one neighbour trust another; for it is rare to find a person, that will not sacrifice truth and faithfulness to their own interest. So that the character of the generation may be, *Children in whom there is no faith.* And what will the end of these things be?

The certain, though slow, Accomplishment of threatened Judgements.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at ETRICK, on a congregational Fast-day, February 26. 1729.

EZEKIEL xii. 23.

Say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.

THIS is a message from God, and a heavy one, to the Jews, who being often threatened, and yet spared from time to time, were like to turn infidels to all Heaven's threatenings, and to make a jest of them. It consists of two parts.

1. They were to be assured, that now at length the days of threatened wrath were at hand. *The days are at hand*, Heb. *have come near*. Of these days four things are to be observed. (1.) They were days of wrath, wherein they were to get such a stroke as they had never got since they settled in Canaan, viz. the destruction of Jerusalem, and the laying the land desolate of them by Nebuchadnezzar. Of these days they had long been forewarned, particularly by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. (2.) They had been long put off, from the time that the Lord began to threaten them; so long that it was turned to a proverb, a profane jest, *The days are prolonged*, ver. 22. Heb. *will be long a-coming*. There is no appearance of them, for all that the angry prophets
are

are always saying, and all the noise they have made about them: if they come at all, and do not blow by, they are not like to come in our time. (3.) Though they were slow in their motion, they were neither slack nor sleeping; they have come near, they have been still advancing. (4.) Their present situation; they were now near at hand. If ye ask, how near they were then? They were within three years of their beginning, Ezek. viii. 1. with 2 Kings xxv. 1. And that the Lord would have them to reckon near.

2. They were to be assured, that in these days all should come on together; *And the effect of every vision.* It imports two things. (1.) That every vision should have an effect. The prophets had got several visions of wrath on Jerusalem, of war, famine, sword, and captivity, which they had revealed to the people. But they were so long delayed as to accomplishment, that they began to say, *Every vision faileth*, ver. 22. Now assure them, saith God, they shall every one have their accomplishment, and not one of them miscarry. (2.) That every vision should have an effect in these days, and so all these miseries should come on together: *The effect of every vision is as at hand.*

The substance of these words may be gathered up in the following doctrine.

DOCT. *Days of threatened wrath long delayed come near to breaking out at length, on an impenitent people; and when they do break out, they are very sore, all coming on together.*

For the first part of this doctrine, I shall,

I. Shew why days of threatened wrath are long delayed.

II. Consider these days of threatened wrath coming near at length to breaking out on an impenitent people.

III. Apply.

I. I shall shew why days of threatened wrath are long delayed.

1. Because the Lord will give sinners space to repent, 2 Pet. iii. 9. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* The barren fig-tree, after the order to cut it down, gets another year's digging and dunging, Luke xiii. 8. 9. Who knows what a little space may do to some, and what brands may be plucked out of the fire, while the Lord delays to strike? The axe lay at the root of the tree of the Jewish church, from the death of Christ, forty years, ere it was cut down: and in that time many were converted, that would have been cut off in their sin, had it come sooner. It has been about as long since the revolution, and many have been brought to Christ during that period.

2. Some such as will never be bettered, are spared for the sake of elect ones in their loins. The generation that came out of Egypt were a generation of wrath; but God made not a full end of them, till there was a generation come of them that might possess the promised land. So the wrath may be delayed for the sake of a generation yet unborn, as a woman with child is reprieved on account of the fruit of her womb, Matth. xxiv. 22.

3. Because the Lord may have some of his own to take out of harm's way before the stroke comes, Is. lviii. 1. *The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.* The angel that came to destroy Sodom, could do nothing till Lot was in Zoar, Gen. xix. 22. Good Josiah behaved to be out of the way before the Babylonish captivity; and Methuselah before the deluge.

4. The Lord even grants something to the prayers of his people in this case, Luke xiii. 8. 9. in the case
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of the barren fig-tree. Desolating strokes use not to come on, till there is a restraint of the Spirit of prayer, with the Lord's people, for averting the stroke.

5. Lastly, For the Lord's name's sake, *Is. xlviii. 9. For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.* He will have his proceeding against a sinful generation clear and unexceptionable: and the delay proclaims God's patience and long-suffering, and leaves them inexcusable. The longer it is a-coming, God's patience appears the more.

II. We will consider these days of threatened wrath coming near at length to breaking out on an impenitent people. This implies,

1. That wrath delayed is not therefore laid aside. A generation continuing impenitent, keeps in the fire of wrath, that it goes not out, howbeit it is for a while kept back from consuming them. Sins national and personal are a debt that will not die out through time. Wrath hangs still in the threatening, as in a cloud that will break at length, if repentance prevent not.

2. Even while it is deferred, it is making speed forward, *2 Pet. ii. 3. Their judgement now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.* The Lord sees impenitent sinners day coming, though they will not see it, *Psal. xxxvii. 13. There is a time set for it as the due time, and no time is lost, whatever are the delays, but it makes haste, Deut. xxxii. 35. Their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*

3. The longer they are delayed, they are the nearer hand; so that when the impenitent generation has most lost sight of them, they are hard at their heels, *1 Thess. v. 3. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.* So in the text, *The days are at hand, and the*

effect of every vision. For sinners turn secure upon the delay; but in the mean time the longer they have been borne with, they have the less reason to be secure. For,

1st, Such a case is a very desperate case, God's forbearance leading men to a secure contempt of him, instead of repentance, Rom. ii. 3. 4. Desperate is the case when the remedy used serves but to increase the disease. That calls for cutting off.

2^{dly}, Abused patience turns always to fury at length, Ezek. xxiv. 13. *In thy filthiness is lowdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.* It is dangerous to play with the patience of God; for fury will take its turn when men are not aware, and patience must end sooner or later with them.

Lastly, It is necessary for the honour of God. The world would turn downright Atheists, if God did not some time baffle their vain hopes of impunity, and shew that he has not forgot their misdemeanors, Psal. l. 21. *Those things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.* Psal. lviii. ult. *Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

USE. As we have been long threatened with days of wrath that are still delayed, while in the mean time the generation is going on impenitently in their course, we have ground to reckon that these days are come near at length to breaking out on us. There are four things that deserve our serious consideration here.

1. That it is long since there was a flaming controversy with this land laid, which in the ordinary method of providence cannot miss to be pursued with signal judgements. That was in the days of our fathers, when solemn national covenants for reforma-

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tion being entered into, with uplifted hands unto God, and reformation was accordingly advanced to a very considerable degree; they began at first to be false and fickle in God's covenant, and at length all of a sudden, as if struck with a frenzy from hell; they openly and avowedly broke and burnt their covenant with God, pulled down and razed their reformation, and for about twenty-eight years raged in oppression, persecution, blood, and death against those who adhered thereto, and would not join them in their apostasy. Reflecting on this we may say, *Shall not the Lord visit for these things? shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* Jer. ix. 9. That controversy has swept away the race of the name of our kings that did it, off the throne; it has turned our parliament that joined them with their authority, out of their house and honour, so that we have no more a Scots parliament either to do good or evil; and it is to be feared, it will soak our land and people in blood next in their turn.

2. I can say from personal knowledge, that, for more than forty years, the Lord has put it in the hearts and mouths of his ministers, that that controversy would be visited on this land with fearful strokes. And for all that is yet come and gone, the effect of these visions seems not to be come yet. I own that what I heard many years ago of this nature; when ministers had more of the Spirit with them than now, being brought out of a hot furnace of trial, has weight with me.

3. Often during that time, especially within these twenty years, has the black cloud hovering over the head of this land, been at the point of breaking, and showering down upon us; and yet has been either quite dispelled without any scathe at all, or only with some drops falling, as in the case of the rebellion in 1715. By all which God has testified that he did not forget the controversy, though time after time he has delayed the thorough pleading of it.

4. And

4. And now we have several shrewd symptoms that the days are near to break out upon us, to avenge the quarrel of his covenant, upon a generation that have entered themselves heirs to the iniquity of their fathers by a course of continued apostasy.

It is childish and unscriptural to say, that those who entered into and so avowedly broke that covenant, are mostly away now: what way can the controversy affect us? For no generation can go back from purity and reformation attained by their fathers, but upon their peril; and so far as they insist in the steps of their backsliding fathers, they justify them in their backslidings, and so enter themselves heirs to their sin, and consequently to their judgements. The covenant made with the Gibeonites in Joshua's time, was binding in the days of Saul, and the slaughter made of them in the days of Saul contrary to that covenant, the land suffered for it many years after that in the latter end of David's reign, 2 Sam. xxi. The blood of Abel came on the generation that crucified Christ, Matth. xxiii. 35.; and to the Jews in Jeremiah's days the Lord saith, *They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers,* Jer. xi. 10.

Sympt. 1. From fearful lengths of apostasy in practice, the very principles of religion have got a root-stroke in our day. Profaneness and immoralities have hugely increased to the filling of the land with oppression and fraud, so that common honesty is rare to be met with; with luxury, sensuality, swearing, perjuries, till the sense of oaths is like to wear out; with fornications, whoredoms, and adulteries, so that I doubt if marriage was ever so contemptuously treated in this land; with contempt of religion and seriousness, so that it is become fashionable to despise it. Reformation is out of sight, head, and heart, and many a wound

wound that work has got in our day : and it has proceeded to a casting off the covenants for it in principle, and a casting dirt on the fates of our zealous forefathers, as unenlightened in the matter. Yea and the root of Christianity has been struck at, by calling in question the necessary existence and independency of Christ the great God our Saviour. It is true, our church has testified her displeasure with the men that have given these bold strokes : but they cease not for all that to be sad symptoms of wrath. So it was with the Jewish church before their destruction.

Sympt. 2. In the mean time the pillars of the land fail. Many mourners in Zion and wrestlers are taken away by death. The generation of professors is exceeding naughty, their conversation generally stumbling and offensive, fitted to expose religion to the contempt of others, and to fright them at it, turning religion into mere shew and talk, without any tolerable regard to the duties of morality ; so that we may say, *O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest ; and, Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people !* And finally, there is a decay and damp on the spirits of the truly-godly, that they are fighting and going backward, in worse case at this day to meet with trials than several years ago.

Sympt. ult. We are far on in the time of the delay, and the controversy is still standing and increasing. Therefore we may conclude, that *the days are near, and the effect of every vision.*

The last branch of the doctrine is, *When threatened wrath long delayed does break out, the days of it are readily very sore, all coming on together.* For,

1. The grounds of the controversy are always increasing with an impenitent people spared. As the snow-ball the farther it is rolled, and the water the farther.

farther it runs; is the bigger; so when all comes to be laid together, it makes swelling accounts.

2. As sin increases wrath increases, Rom. ii. So the longer judgement is a-coming, it is the forer when it comes. When God enters on the plea, he pursues for both principal and interest together. Hence,

3. The stroke in that case is sudden, fore, and of various kinds. Like a water long dammed up, breaking out at length, it comes down suddenly, and overflows all its banks.

Repent therefore, and betake yourselves to Jesus Christ, if so be ye may be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, Sinners day will come at length, and a sad reckoning they will have.

But come what will come, let not the godly despond. In the forest days, *'it shall be well with the righteous.* See a strange word, Luke xxi. 25. 28. *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, &c. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.* What though there arise a strong wind, rending the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces, and after that an earthquake, and after that a fire; the Lord may be coming after all in a still small voice, as he did in Elijah's time, 1 Kings xix. 11. The Lord may bring on the heaviest judgements on our land, nay even make it nearly desolate, yet out of the ruins of the whole, he may rear up a stately building to himself, and give to such as shall survive the desolating stroke to see glorious days.

A Caveat against seeking great Things in an evil Day.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at ETRICK, on a Fast-day appointed by
the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale, April 24.
1729.

JEREMIAH xlv. 5.

*And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them
not; for behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh,
saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for
a prey in all places whither thou goest.*

PROvidence is visibly frowning on the land at this
day, and on the country, infomuch that few or
none of us all have missed of these frowns, one way
or other. Our great duty is to suit our spirits to the
dispensations of the day. And the voice of God to
each of us seems to be that in the text, *And seekest thou
great things for thyself? &c.* O that we were as sure
of the well-grounded application of the latter part,
as we are of the former.

This is a part of God's message to Baruch, a well-
inclined pious young man, setting out in the world.
He was Jeremiah's scribe, and read the roll, chap.
xxxvi. Thereupon an order is issued out to apprehend
him, and he is forced to abscond. He is discouraged
with that, and very uneasy, one trouble coming
on him on the neck of another, chap. xliii. 5.
instead of the great things he had in view. In the
words we have,

I. A

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1. A check to him for the fret he was in, upon what he had met with. And therein,

(1.) He is rebuked for his golden dreams of worldly ease and comfort, the entertaining of which had made him so uneasy on his disappointment; *And seekest thou great things for thyself?* He is not rebuked for seeking simply: a time of trial should be a time of requests, a praying time; but then we should be sure to seek aright. He was seeking great things for himself; not the great things of another world, that is never unseasonable; but the great things of this world, worldly ease, rest, and prosperity: and had he sought these with due submission to the will of God, it had not been ill taken; but he sought them inordinately, being on the fret on the disappointment. And therefore he is rebuked here, as for a thing unseasonable, shameful, and unreasonable.

(2.) He is peremptorily ordered to humble and quiet himself, and suit his spirit to the dispensation of the day; *Seek them not*: Lay your neck under the yoke; be as a weaned child; and be mainly concerned how you may be carried through in the day of the Lord's anger.

2. The reason of this check given him. Wherein,

(1.) An universal calamity coming on the land, is laid before him: *Behold me bringing evil on all flesh*, Heb. A general stroke is on its way, when all will be in the utmost confusion, by the Babylonians. Is it time for you to be painting your own cabin, when the whole ship is sinking? to be dreaming of ease, when the Lord is risen up to break down, and pluck up the whole land?

(2.) The most that was to be expected in such a day, viz. to escape with the life, and that the Lord assures him of, *his life for a prey in all places whither he went*. He intimates, that, ere all was done, he should be well content to quit the great things, so that he could escape with the life. He should have a tossed life of it, going from place to place; but God would

would protect him, when many bulls should lie on the green.

The substance of the words may be summed up in the two following doctrines.

DOCT. I. *The appearance of God's bringing a stroke on all, should bring off men from seeking great things in a world for themselves, and move them to suit their spirits to the dispensations of the day.*

DOCT. II. *It should move men, under such an appearance, that a time may come, that they shall think they win well away that win away with their life.*

I shall explain each doctrine in its order.

DOCT. I. *The appearance of God's bringing a stroke on all, should bring off men from seeking great things in a world for themselves, and move them to suit their spirits to the dispensations of the day.*

In discoursing this subject, I shall shew,

I. What appearance there is of a general stroke coming on all at this day.

II. How we under that appearance should suit our spirits to the dispensations of the day, not seeking great things.

III. Wherefore such an appearance should bring us off from seeking great things for ourselves.

I. I shall shew what appearance there is of a general stroke coming on all at this day.

1. Universal corruption of life and manners, as was the case in the antediluvian world, Gen. vi. 12. 13. *God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them: and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.* A deluge of sin is a preface of a deluge of wrath. The former is let in upon us, and no wonder the latter follow. Profaneness overflows all its

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banks.

banks. There is a growing untenderness among all ranks in church and state. Our very gold is become dim; religion is turned with many into mere form and shew, and many have quite lost the very form which they had.

2. The notable stand which the success of the gospel is now at, Luke xiii. 7. It is near about forty years we have in peace been drinking in the rain of the gospel; but where is the fruit now? Heb. vi. 7. *8. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.* This church is like land now so long laboured, that it is worn out. Look to our temple, and we may see a departing glory, a sad presage; Ezek. ix. 3. 4. *And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house, and he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; and the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.* The white horse of the gospel despised, is followed with the red and pale horse; and contempt of the marriage-feast with destroying armies. Consider that alarming passage, Is. vi. 9. 10. *11. Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.* Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, *Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.*

3. Incurribleness under former strokes, partly threatened and partly inflicted, as in Amos iv. See ver.

ver. 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* O how often has the Lord been threatening this generation, these bygone years, with desolating strokes; yet has mercifully prevented, or carried them off without coming to an extremity! But still as the new deliverance came, the generation has grown a degree worse, till it has arrived now at a height.

4. Few mourners in Zion left among us. Many of them are now removed by death, whose room is not filled up, Is. lvii. 1. Such as remain, there is a damp on their spirits. The mouths of a praying remnant for a sinking land are much closed, and their prayers returned into their bosom, as for a generation of wrath.

5. The striking at the root of Christianity, by the atheism and infidelity of the generation. That bitter root began to spring forth shortly after the revolution: but the magistrate effectually interposing, and making one an example to the rest, it was curbed. But now it has spread broad and wide, and the proper divinity of the Son of God is attacked through the three nations by many. And the hands of the general assembly of this church have been filled with matter of that sort. It was the opposition to the Son of God that ruined the Jewish nation, and it is like to be the drop in the cup of Britain and Ireland, that will make it run over.

6. Lastly, The lesser strokes going through the whole land at this day, as signs of greater to come. Trade is decayed through the whole land, in the mean time a dearth of victual, an unusual stroke upon the flocks, great sickness, and frequent deaths in every corner, and a threatening season, whereby the earth is made as iron already. These things look like warnings of worse to come.

II. I shall shew how we under that appearance
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should suit our spirits to the dispensations of the day, not seeking great things.

1. Awake out of your golden dreams of worldly ease, and lay your account with tribulation and trial, *If. xxxii. 9. 10. Rise up, ye women that are at ease, hear my voice, ye careless daughters, give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women: for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come.* There is a disposition in all to dote this way, and build castles in the air that will never be inhabited. It is so with carnal men, who are often singing of peace, when destruction is at the door; as was the case with the rich man in the gospel, *Luke xii. 19. 20. I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* And even good men are apt to fall into such doting; *Job xxix. 18. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.* And it is evident from the case of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, who said, *Lord, it is good for us to be here,* *Matth. xvii. 4.* What was their fate? Peter was crucified, James was slain, John was banished into a desolate island, though he afterwards died in peace. If ye mind for heaven, at all times ye shall meet with tribulation, *John xvi. ult.* Though ye hold the broad way, it is like in this time ye will meet with tribulation.

2. Set not your hearts upon the world's wealth, the silver and gold, the corn and cattle; for ye may soon find them like a sandy brae, that will slide away with you: but if ye be weaned, and make God and his promises the stay of your heart, ye will be able to stand in the evil day, *Hab. iii. 17.* Let Christ be your all, and then blow what wind it will, all yours shall be safe.

3. Seek nothing, less, nor more, in any way inconsistent

consistent with justice or charity to your neighbour. Do not dare to drive on your own interest in any unjust way. Divest not yourselves of mercy and charity to others, in pursuing your own interest, without any bowels of compassion. It is very ordinary in a time of public calamity, for one to build up himself on the ruins of another. For that sort of work already, God is contending, and will not overlook it; Is. xxxiii. 1. *Wo to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee: when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.* James ii. 13. *For he shall have judgement without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.*

4. Be content with, and thankful for the little that ye have, and take God's security for what ye want. *For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,* Heb. xiii. 5. He that has taken some from you, might justly have taken all; and whatever he has taken from you, he might have taken your forfeited life when he took it. Therefore acknowledge ye are his debtors, and let not your crosses and trials make you overlook mercies.

5. Sit quietly under your cloud, be it thinner or thicker, till the Lord be pleased to make it clear, and bring you forth to the light, Micah vii. 9. Whatever yoke the Lord lays on you, bear it tamely: and it will not gall your neck, be it never so heavy. Say as David, *Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child,* Psal. cxxxi. 2.

Lastly, Seek the things that are most necessary for yourselves, and in them ye will not be disappointed; Luke x. ult. *One thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.* It is to stir up hereunto, that God denies men great things of this world; for it is hard to have

great things of this world, and not to flight the necessary things. And these are two.

(1.) Seek the happiness of another world, Matth. vi. 33. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.* The more that providence frowns upon our lot here, let us be the more eager in our pursuit of a portion in heaven. If God refuse to give us our good things in this life, let us take it for an intimation, that he will have us to insist for them in the other life; Matth. vi. 20. 21. *Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

(2.) Grace for the way to it, especially for the time of trial, how to get cleanly through. The most necessary thing in a time of private affliction, or public calamity, is grace to carry right under it. That is more necessary than deliverance, as the soundness of the soul and conscience is more valuable than ease to the outward man.

III. I shall shew wherefore such an appearance should bring us off from seeking great things for ourselves. It may have this influence on us, if we consider,

1. That we have enough to do otherwise, in preparing to meet the Lord, Amos iv. 12. When the Bridegroom is on his way, and the voice is heard, *Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him;* it is not time for the virgins to be trifling, but going out to meet him. When the heavens are growing black above one's head, it is not for one to be lying at ease on the grass, but to make away to the house; as did Noah, Heb. xi. 7. *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

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2. Such a carnal frame of spirit mightily unfits for a time of trial, Luke xxi. 34. *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.* Jonah's being exceeding glad of the gourd, made the withering of it intolerable to him. It makes one like a silly dove, without heart, when courage and resolution to set out against the fury of the storm is most necessary.

3. Great things in an evil day expose men to greatest troubles: so that many times they are like great weights of gold on a drowning man, that make him but sink the faster, Eccl. v. 13. *There is a fore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* And this may be one reason, why judgement ordinarily begins at the house of God, the Lord thereby making way for the main flocks becoming easy to them; as in the case of Lot. A stormy wind will rend up oaks by the roots, while shrubs are tossed only from side to side, 2 Kings xxv. 7. 12. When one is breaking down a house, it is the highest stones that get the forest fall.

4. Great things in an evil day are great temptations. It is not easy to lose a little for Christ and a good conscience: the bond is the stronger to draw people out of the road, where they have great things in hazard. The Lord best knows our temper, and what is best for our safety in an evil day.

5. A low and afflicted lot in such a day fits people for sympathizing with others, 2 Cor. i. 6. *And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings, which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.* It is a selfish, hard-hearted world: and it is hard for them that are themselves at ease in Zion, to be grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore, while the Lord is distributing

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distributing sorrows, let each welcome his own part, as necessary for that end.

Lastly, Though great things are most easy for the outward man, a low and afflicted lot is most for the thriving of the inward, Zeph. iii. 12. *I will leave in the midst of thee, an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.* It has readily more Christian experiences, than the full, easy, prosperous life has. And then though one may live more commodiously in the latter, yet it is more easy in the former case to die.

I shall conclude with a very few words on the second doctrine.

DOCT. II. *It should move men under such an appearance, that a time may come, that they shall think they win well away that win away with their life.*

A sweeping stroke of mortality, whereof we have had an awful swatch, a stroke of pestilence, famine, or the sword of a foreign enemy, would soon make us forget all other things, so that life might be safe. We have been threatened with all these, and it is very like that some of them will be the lot of this generation, Num. xxiv. 23. *Alas! who shall live when God doth this!* They bid fair to get their life for a prey in such a case, that are suiting their spirits to their lot, and to the dispensations of providence, not seeking great things for themselves, though they fight while others sing. Therefore secure an interest in Christ, and in the covenant that stands fast in him, and live by faith, and so it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

Mercy

Mercy often interposes to prevent the
Execution of Judgements.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at ETRICK, November 26. 1729; being
a Day of Thanksgiving appointed by the Presby-
tery of Selkirk, for the plentiful Harvest.

HOSEA xi. 8.

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

THIS is the very language of God's dispensations to us at this day, whereby it is come to pass that we are allowed an occasion of thanksgiving, after very threatening appearances of providence.

We have here represented to us a struggle betwixt the divine attributes, as to the proceeding with Ephraim or Israel, one crying, Strike; another, Hold thy hand. It is spoken of God after the manner of men; not as if there were any real contrariety of motions and affections in God, who is always of one mind: but, in respect of the variousness of the events of providence towards a sinful people, he is represented as a kind, but provoked Father, in whom there is a struggle of affections towards his rebellious son. And here there is,

1. A demand and motion of justice against Israel,
called

called *Ephraim*, for that was the chief tribe of them. And it is supposed. The demand of justice is, *Ephraim* is bent to backsliding; let him be given up, as an incorrigible son, an incurable patient. *Israel* called to the Most High is deaf to the call; let him be delivered into the hand of the enemy, as a lamb to the lion to be rent in pieces. They have carried themselves like the neighbours of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, rather than those of *Judah*; let them be made like them, like *Admah* and *Zeboim*; Gen. xix. 24. *Then the Lord rained upon Sodom, and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.* Let the threatening be executed, Deut. xxix. 23. *The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grafs groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath.*

2. An interposing of mercy in their favour, expressed. Mercy says, *How shall I give thee up? How can I find in my heart to do it!* Thou art my son, though a very untoward one; my people, though a very rebellious people. I find the bowels of a Father stirring towards thee: it is hard for me to make thee like those mine enemies that never stood in such a relation to me.

3. The workings of mercy to stop the execution of the demands of justice. *My heart* inflamed with anger against them, *is turned within me* into kindness and compassion. Every time I begin to strike, my heart misgives me, that I must draw back my hand; still I relent for him or repent, and these relenting or repenting bowels within me glow towards him, causing to pity and spare.

The doctrine observable from the words is,

DOCTR. *Our gracious God being loth to go to an extremity with a people in special relation to him, mer-*

ey often interposeth for their relief, when they are on the brink of ruin.

In handling this doctrine, I shall,

I. Take notice of some things supposed in this.

II. How mercy interposeth for the relief of such a people, when on the brink of ruin.

III. Give reasons why mercy thus interposeth in such a case.

IV. Apply.

I. I shall take notice of some things supposed in this. It supposes,

1. That a people in special relation to God, as his church, his covenanted people, may so far forget their duty, and give themselves the loose in sinful courses, that they justly deserve to be abandoned, given up, and cast off by him. The visible church sometimes behaves itself in most of its members, as if they were the synagogue of Satan. This is clear from the text, and confirmed by our case at this day.

2. God is impartial in his judgements; and if God's covenant-people carry themselves like strangers, they may expect at length to fare like them. Justice has a demand on the sinners in Zion, as well as on the sinners in Babylon, II. xlii. 24. *Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law.* And the strokes of God on those of his own house, when they do come on in earnest, are readily very fore, Amos iii. 2. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* Their peculiar relation to him puts a peculiar edge on them.

3. Matters may be going fast to an extremity with such a people, and they yet continuing their course, and remaining impenitent. So was it here; there was nothing in their carriage to alter the course of providence

providence towards them: they continued their provocations in the face of the most awful threatenings; and when on the brink of ruin. And just so it is with the generation in these lands at this day.

Lastly, When there is no reason from them to stop procedure against them, God out of his sovereign mercy may yet put a stop to it. So he did with Israel in Egypt, Ezek. xx. 8. 9. *But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made my self known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. And many a time on the deliverances of his people, and on ours in particular, may that be written, Ezek. xxxvi. 32. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

II. I shall shew how mercy interposeth for the relief of such a people, when on the brink of ruin.

1. By putting off the execution of threatenings against them, when they seem to be come to the very point of execution. Thus the barren fig-tree, when the sentence was passed on it, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* Luke xiii. 7. was, by the interposition of mercy, spared another year; and the old world was spared seven days after the expiring of the hundred and twenty years. How many times have the clouds been black above our heads, ready to shower down, and yet the storm has blown by?

2. By moderating the stroke when it has come on, that it has not gone to the extremity that might have been feared, Is. xxvii. 8. *In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind*

wind in the day of the east-wind. The destroying axe being threatened, mercy has prevailed to hold with the pruning-knife; and God has lightly afflicted, when justly he might have made his strokes heavy to a pitch.

Lastly, By putting a stop even to the course of lesser strokes, when he might have carried them on to the making of a full end, Jer. v. 10. *Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy, but make not a full end: take away her battlements, for they are not the Lord's.* He returns and does them good, after he has done them evil. Having pinched them a while, in mercy he relieves them, looses their bands, and lays meat again before them.

III. I shall give the reasons why mercy thus interposeth for the relief of such a people on the brink of ruin.

1. Because of a mourning and serious remnant that may be among them, endeavouring to keep their garments clean, as God would have spared Sodom, if there had been but ten righteous persons found in it, Gen. xviii. 32. In public calamities they readily bear their share, and the Lord himself has a sympathy with them in their afflictions, as he had with Israel, Is. lxiii. 9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.* And therefore he extends mercy to the community where-in they are. And he has a regard to their prayers and supplications in that case; Exod. xxxii. 10. *Now therefore let me alone,* says the Lord to Moses, *that my wrath may wax hot against them.*

2. Because of the insolence wherewith their enemies would carry themselves, both towards God and them, if God should give up with them. Many a time the church is more obliged for preservation to the insolent temper of her enemies, than to the

good disposition of many of her members; Deut. xxxii. 26. 27. *I said, I would scatter them into corners, said the Lord of Israel of old, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.* The blasphemies of a Popish and malignant party have been a plea for mercy to keep us hitherto out of their hands.

Lastly, Because God has a peculiar delight in mercy, it is his darling attribute, Micah vii. 18. As the bee naturally gives honey, but does not sting, except when it is irritated and provoked; so God readily goes into the side of mercy, and does not punish but when provoked to anger, Lam. iii. 33. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is his strange act, Is. xxviii. 21. For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

I shall conclude with a very short improvement.

This day this scripture is fulfilled in our eyes, as it has been many a day. Had the summer been of a piece with the threatening unnatural-like spring, it was hard as it was; but it would have been far more so. Had this harvest misgiven as it some time threatened, what a heavy condition would the country have been in for want of bread! Therefore,

1. Let us be thankful to God, whose mercy interposed seasonably for our relief, when we were on the brink of ruin. To that we must attribute the relief, not to our own behaviour. For the sins of the generation, the Atheism, blasphemy, profaneness, unfruitfulness under the gospel, added to the sins of former times, with the killing aggravations thereof, demanded ruining strokes.

2. Let

2. Let us own God to be a gracious God, slow to wrath; saying with David, Psal. cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and dost good.* And Psal. cxlv. 8. 9. *The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his other works.* Let his goodness lead and excite us to repentance, and to a more conscientious use of plenty; and learn to fear the Lord, and his goodness, Hos. iii. 5. walking humbly before him in a sense of undeserved favours. Jacob's example is worthy of our imitation in this matter, Gen. xxxii. 10. *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, (says he), and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.*

3. Let us know that this kind dealing will render us inexcusable, if we repent not, and turn from all our sins unto God through Christ. The favourable interpositions of his providence towards us, time after time, not having their designed effect upon us, in melting us, our guilt will thereby be fearfully heightened. See in what light the Lord considers such conduct, and how he represents it, Is. i. 1. 2. *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

Lastly, Ruining strokes coming on after such workings of mercy, will go to the quick, and bring double ruin on the generation. The more mercy has prevailed to ward off judgements, the heavier will judgements be when they come. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, let us be induced to return unto him in the exercise of faith, gospel-repentance, and reformation according to his word.

The duty of owning God in our civil
Affairs recommended and urged.

S E R M O N

Preached at ETRICK, March 22. 1719.

JOSHUA ix. 14.

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.

AMONG the evidences of the decay of religion at this day, it is none of the least, that God and his law are so little owned and looked to, in managing of civil affairs. Many in these affairs, though of great weight, have little or no use at all for their religion. Men can dispose of themselves and families, and enter into bargains and contracts, without ever looking further than their worldly interest or fancy. This is the time of year wherein the throng of that kind comes in. And I would caution you against forgetting God in these matters.

In the text we have the error of the princes of Israel in their managing of their bargain with the Gibeonites, which was displeasing and dishonourable to God, uncomfortable to themselves when they saw afterwards how they had been outwitted, but could not mend themselves, and offensive to the congregation. Their error lay in these two things.

1. Their leaning to their own understanding in the whole management of the business: *The men*, the princes of Israel, *took of their victuals*, their mouldy provision. They did not this out of any
want

want of victuals of their own, nor fondness they had for theirs, nor as feasting with them upon them, for they would have made but a very unpleasant meal. But they did it to examine the truth of their representation; and by their handling and tasting of them they found they were old and dry, and upon this insufficient proof were satisfied, that all was as was represented, and so proceeded to covenant with them.

2. Not owning of God in the business. They might and ought to have asked the Lord's mind in this matter, and to have walked by his direction. But as if they had been independent of God in such matters, and had been wise enough to see to themselves, they never owned God in the matter. No doubt they thought they needed not, that it was a plain case: but therein they find their rashness mires them afterward. Had they first asked counsel of God, and then taken of their victuals, they had discovered the cheat, and kept their consciences clean. But they left God, and God left them, in the business.

DOCT. As it is the duty of all to own and acknowledge God in their civil affairs, and business with men in the world; so God takes notice of, and is much displeased with mens not owning of him in these.

In discoursing from this point, I shall,

I. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

II. Shew whence it is that men do not own God in their affairs.

III. Apply.

I. I am to give the reasons of the doctrine. Consider,

1. God's command binds us peremptorily to own him in all our ways without exception, Prov. iii. 6. *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* We must take our religion along with us,

to the court and to the market, as well as to the church and the closet; to our dealings with men, as well as to our dealings with God, and that under the pain of disobedience to the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. How then can one imagine, but God is displeased with the not owning him in these things?

2. God has given a promise of direction to his people in all their matters, Prov. iii. 6. forecited. Psal. cxii. 5.—*A good man—will guide his affairs with discretion.* And what God has put into the covenant by way of promise, his people ought to look to him for by faith, and sue to him for by prayer. And it is highly dishonouring to God, not to be concerned for that which he has made promise of, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.*

3. We can do nothing well or wisely in any matter, but as the Lord is pleased to direct and guide us, Jer. x. 23. *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Common gifts are from the Lord as well as saving grace, James i. 17. *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* Exod. xxxi. 6. *In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom.* If one man have a dexterity to manage his civil affairs better than another, it is the Lord himself that makes the difference. And he has the lock and key of these gifts, to give the use and exercise of them, or to take it away in any particular whatsoever, when he pleases. Hence often the wisest are outwitted, and act as egregious fools, being infatuated of God.

4. The success of all our projects and endeavours depends on God entirely, so that men may do their best to no purpose, while God frowns on the business, Lam. iii. 37. *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?* Psal. cxxvii. 1. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watch-*

man

man waketh but in vain. God has a negative on all means and instruments, so that the most feasible means shall miscarry, if he do not order them to prosper. God has a wheel within all the wheels of the world, which turns them what way he will: so that often man does propose one way, but God disposeth a quite other way.

II. I proceed to shew, whence it is that men do not own God in their affairs.

1. Habitual untenderness of conscience is a main cause of it. Hence our Lord says, *If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!* Matth. vi. 23. Most men have benumbed consciences, which makes them go through the world at random, hardly fearing the offence of God in any thing, Tit. i. ult. *They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.* They who are truly tender in one thing of offending God, will be tender in all things: but who can think, that those who are untender in all other matters, can be tender in their worldly business? Paul's exercise would mix religion with civil business, Acts xxiv. 16. *Herein do I exercise myself, says he, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* But alas! it is rare in the world.

• 2. Most mens religion is but a powerless, vain, empty shew, 2 Tim. iii. 5. *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* It cannot awe their consciences to a strict conformity to the way of God in all things, without reserve. They have still their reserves in their obedience, which never comes to be universal. They halve religion, pretend and make a shew of piety towards God, which cannot stand in the way of their worldly interest: but they make no conscience of righteousness, mercy, and charity, towards men. Well may the Lord address them, as he did the people of Judah of old, Is. i. 11.

16. 17. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.—Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

3. Many lay their projects in these matters so contrary to the rules of religion, that they cannot look for God's blessing on them, or direction in them, Psal. xiv. 4. *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?—they call not upon the Lord.* So they do not own God in them, because they see, upon a view of their measures, that they are unlawful ones, and their consciences would condemn them before the Lord: They are ruled by their lusts and passions in their contrivances, which makes them break over the rules of piety towards God, and righteousness towards men, to accomplish their designs. And what use could religion be of in these, but to mar all? and therefore they carefully stave off the dictates of their consciences, to make way for the fulfilling of their unlawful projects.

4. Self-conceit. Men have a high opinion of their own wit, and are confident they can guide well enough, and so they do not see their need of owning God in these matters. Thus in the text, *The men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of God.* But little do they consider that passage, Prov. xxiii. 26. *My son, give me thine heart; and let thine eyes observe my ways.* This is to make flesh our arm, which God can soon make a withered arm, Jer. xvii. 5. 6. Living by faith is quite contrary to this, and carries men out of themselves to depend on God in all things. And there is good reason for it. For says the wise man, Eccl. ix. 11. *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread*

to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

5. Many are so little acquainted with religion, and particularly with the way of looking to the Lord, for direction in all things, that they do not think religion is concerned in their civil affairs, farther than that the thing they do be lawful in itself. But this is a wide mistake. People may perish by lawful things, following them in a way not approved of God, as we see in the case of the old world, Matth. xxiv. 38. *In the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, &c.* We are obliged to eye the honour of God in all things, 1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God; to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,* Col. iii. 17. that is, in obedience to his call pointed out to us by his word and providence, and in dependence on him for direction, throughbearing in it, and success. This was the psalmist's practice, Psal. cxxiii. 2. *Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress: so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.*

6. Lastly, Not weighing the event of their projects, which is wholly in the Lord's hand. Had the princes of Israel considered, what weight was in this business, and what it turned to within three days after they had made their bargain, ver. 16. they would not have been so rash. How often is that done in a day or hour with much confidence, that is regretted many a day and year? Lot settled among those of Sodom without consulting of God, Gen. xiii. 10. 12. 13. but afterward, as he had little peace while he was there, he got a very sad removing again. Since we know not what may be in the womb of a day, we had
need

need every day to live in a close dependence on the Lord.

I now proceed to apply this subject; and the only use I shall make of it, shall be by way of exhortation.

I exhort all to own and acknowledge God in your civil affairs and business in the world. Behave yourselves as Christians, as fearers of God, therein, at all times, and especially at such times wherein ye have business of greatest weight in hand. Take not the way of the world, as ye would not perish with the world.

1. Tenants, in the taking of your lands, own God the great Landlord, and wrong not your neighbours, 1 Cor. vi. 9. And whether ye sit or remove, be sure ye do it with a good conscience. Abuse not the goodness of God, in the thriving of your stocks, lest God send a curse on them, and make room enough. It will not excuse you before God, that ye do not begin the work; *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*, Exod. xxiii. 2. Ye must not follow either. Will one's wronging you give you a licence to wrong another? No, not if it were the very person that had wronged you, far less another that has done you no injury, Prov. iii. 31. *Envy thou not the oppressor, and chuse none of his ways*. Chap. xxiv. 29. *Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work*. No doubt it is Satan's game to find out some to lead the van in an unrighteous course, that others may follow.

2. Masters, in the hiring of your servants, own God the great Master, remembering that every Christian's family should be a church, Rom. xvi. 5. Gather not together the scum and dregs of servants, which may be the reproach of a society into which they come. Read the 101st psalm, and inquire what they are, and what they have been, as well as what they can do. It is hard to get choice, I own: but when a person has laid the matter seriously before the Lord,

Lord, begged God's direction therein, for the furnishing of his family, and done his best endeavour in the way of means, he may have the more peace whatever way it fall.

3. Servants, in your disposing of yourselves, own God the great Master; and make it a matter of solemn seriousness, what company ye cast yourselves into. Have regard to the interest of your souls, and not to your worldly interest only, in that matter. It is a business of great weight, how ye dispose of yourselves, and there may be in it either a snare to your souls, or advantage to them. And it is a pity it should be so lightly thought of. Labour to know the mind of God in the matter, by his word and by his providence. And labour to be sure ye be there where God is guiding you to by his eye set on you.

4. *Lastly*, Let every one in their civil affairs in the world own God, and carry their religion about with them, in whatever business providence lays to their hand. Remember the text, and split not on the rock which the princes of Israel dashed upon. Therefore,

1st, Entertain no project, though promising never so fair for your temporal advantage, which is not just, being weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, no project which will wound your conscience in the least. Consider that passage, *Is. xxxiii. 14. 15. The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surpris'd the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil: he shall dwell on high, &c.* An unjust project, tending to the wronging of any man, is what God will never bless; and is to be looked on as a bait of the devil, for catching the soul, wherein
the

the loss is a thousand times more than the gain, as will appear at balancing the accounts.

2dly, Lay all your just projects and lawful designs, especially in matters of greatest weight, before the Lord in prayer, Phil. iv. 6. *Be careful for nothing : but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* Beg of God direction to what may be most convenient for you, Prov. xxx. 8. laying yourselves down at his feet. It is he that has determined the bounds of all mens habitations, has the hearts of all men in his hands, and can bring them together for their comfort, who knew not of one another. Beg of him wisdom and discretion to manage your affairs; for he it is who doth *instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him*, Is. xxviii. 26. And beg of him success in your lawful undertakings, Psal. i. 3.

3dly, Pursue solemn prayers with frequent ejaculations to the Lord in the time of the management of your affairs, 1 Theff. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.* Sometimes ye must come into difficulties in these things. Faithless thinking how to do, becomes not a Christian. Look up to the Lord, and think, pray, and consider what is best to be done. Perhaps the nature of the thing will not allow solemn prayer. But people can never be in such a hurry or haste to come to a point, but they may get time for an ejaculation, for a glance of the eye of the soul to the Lord, as Nehemiah did, chap. ii. 4. There is a promise to fix on in such a case, Prov. iv. 12. *When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.*

4thly, Hold closely and strictly by the rule of justice, as managing your affairs under the eye of a just God, who hates all unrighteousness. God requires this of thee, Micah vi. 8. *to do justly.* 1 Theff. iv. 6. *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.* A man may be just in his dealings, and yet no good Christian; but no man can be a good Christian

Christian who is not just in his dealings. Keep the golden rule of righteousness always before your eyes; *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.* And do not to others, what you would not have done to you in their circumstances. And remember, that God the Judge of all is no respecter of persons, nor can be biased in favour of any man.

5thly, Never reckon that advantageous which will not be for God's honour, and for your soul's good, 1 Cor. x. 31. forecited. Separate gain from godliness, and the gain will not be worth the taking up at your foot, being but a bait to cover the hook that will pierce into the soul. The interest of eternity is the greatest interest, and what is best for that is best for the man, be what he will. And therefore in all changes and projects whatsoever, ask yourselves, Will this be best for my soul's behoof?

6. Lastly, Manage your matters without anxiety and distrustful cares, but with a believing dependence on the Lord, having first laid them over on God. It becomes a Christian well to rest satisfied, and say, *He shall chuse our inheritance for us,* Psal. xlvii. 4. Anxiety is unprofitable; but dependence on the Lord both gives ease to the heart, and has its plentiful income of fruit in the Lord's own time. For motives, consider,

Motive 1. God's eye is on us at all times, and he will call us to an account of our behaviour in our civil affairs as well as in others, Eccl. xii. 13. 14. *Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* Let us keep in view that awful tribunal then where-ever we go, whatever we be employed about; so shall we be excited to walk as in the sight of him, who is now our witness, and will hereafter be our judge.

Mot. 2. Our time is so short, and the continuance

of our business in the world so uncertain, that nothing which can be gained by going out of God's way, is worth the pains of going off our way for it. A little ground will serve each of us ere long, and ere long we shall have no more portion in what is done under the sun.

Mot. 3. A little gain with God's good-will and approbation is better than much without it, Psal. xxxvii. 16. There is more sap and poison in it, men have a surer hold of it, and there is a vast difference in the after reckoning.

Mot. 4. This is the most comfortable way in case of matters misgiving, and in case of disappointments and crosses in the world. Our comforts in the world are very uncertain. Riches are not for ever. A man may meet with a cross in the way where God bids him go, and with a stroke in the way he went without God's leave. But the former has inward peace, which the other wants in that case.

Mot. 5. At this rate, ye may have communion with God in your civil affairs, and experiences of the Lord's love in your worldly business, which the world knows not of, as Jacob had, Gen. xxxiii. 10. Answers of prayer are sweet in whatever matter they be; and to get a common mercy in the way of dependence on the Lord, puts a double value on it.

Mot. 6. The striving against the stream of a wicked generation requires this. There are many to dishonour God, by not owning him in their civil affairs; join not with them, lest religion be wounded through your sides. When the best is as a brier, and the most upright as a thorn-hedge, it paves the way for a national stroke, with which we are so much threatened.

Mot. 7. last. As ever ye would have a blessing, and escape a curse on your labours, and your souls too, own God in your affairs. For whoso honoureth God, he will honour, and make him prosperous. Wisdom will be justified of her children.

Resolute

Resolute cleaving to the Lord Jesus illustrated and enforced.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at Galashiels, Sabbath afternoon, August
6. 1721, after the Celebration of the Sacrament
of the Lord's Supper.

ACTS xi. 23.

*And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they
would cleave unto the Lord.*

IN some preceding verses we have an account of
a great addition made to the Christian church,
by the conversion of many in Antioch and other
places. The means of it was the preaching of
Christ; that is the appointed means of the conver-
sion of sinners, Gal. iii. 2. The occasion of the
gospel coming to that people, was the persecution raised
at Jerusalem. Satan's design in it was to quench the
holy fire, but God turned it about to the spread-
ing and increasing of it. Thus Satan is often out-
shot in his own bow; and God's people, the more
they are oppressed, the more they grow. What this
success was owing to, was *the hand of the Lord* with
the preachers. No doubt there was a more than
ordinary edge upon the spirits of the persecuted mi-
nisters who preached to them; but that was not it
which did the business, but *the hand of the Lord with
them*. The nearest means of their conversion was
their believing: faith is that which turns the whole

man unto God. The news of this success of the gospel coming to the church at Jerusalem, Barnabas is sent from thence to them, to hold hand to the work. And in the words of the text. we may observe,

1. How he was affected when he came among them. Discerning the grace of God among them shining forth in their way and walk, *he was glad.* He rejoiced in spirit, to see the hopeful case they were in as to their souls, they having embraced Christ. The reason is remarkable, ver. 24. *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.* And a good man will rejoice in the success of the gospel, whoever be the instruments God makes use of and honours therein; though selfish men are apt to grudge in such a case.

2. What he did, when he came among them. He bent his endeavours towards their confirmation, in *exhorting them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* Those whom he exhorted were *all*, viz. those who appeared to have embraced Christ. The duty he exhorted them to, is to *cleave to the Lord*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was preached to them, ver. 20. and whom they had received. The words properly signify *to abide by the Lord*, much akin to that, John xv. 4. *Abide in me.* The manner of the duty is, *with purpose of heart*, i. e. resolutely, laying it down aforehand for a sure conclusion, that come what would, they must not part with him, but abide by him.

The following doctrine seems native from the words.

DOCT. *Resolute cleaving to, and abiding by Christ, is the great duty, which all that appear to have received him, are to be exhorted to.*

In discoursing from this doctrine, I will shew,

I. In

I. In the general, what is implied in this resolute cleaving to, and abiding by Christ.

II. Why those that have received Christ, are to be exhorted to cleave resolutely to, and abide by him.

III. Make some practical improvement.

I. I shall shew you in the general, what is implied in this resolute cleaving to, and abiding by Christ. It implies,

1. The soul's taking hold of Christ offered in the gospel, John i. 12. being once joined to the Lord by faith, 1 Cor. vi. 17. They that are not joined to the Lord, and so not disjoined from their former lovers, cannot cleave to the Lord; they that are not yet come to Christ, cannot abide by him. The foundation must be laid in the soul's closing with Christ, before there can be place for the superstructure, *viz.* cleaving to him.

2. That the separation of the soul from Christ will be essayed; while we are here, we must lay our account with it, Rom. viii. 35. The devil, the world, and the flesh will make the essay. People had need to hold; for assuredly these enemies will draw. (1.) They will try to seduce you by soft methods, to draw you to destruction with silken cords of temptation. (2.) To drive you away by violence, and force you from Christ by hard methods, as with iron rods, Cant. viii. 7. There are two ways to rob one of their love to Christ, smothering it with earth, and quenching it with floods of water.

3. Keeping hold of Christ over the belly of all the essays made to part us from him, Cant. viii. 7. We must keep the hold we have got, and not quit it come what will. We must stand our ground, however hot the battle be for separating us from him. We must abide by him, (1.) Without intermission, Psal. cxix. 112. *I have inclined mine heart, says David, to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.* We must not be hereaway thereaway in our religion; one day for

God, and another day for the devil; taking our religion by fits and starts: but remember, that our ears are bored to Christ's door-posts to be for him for ever.

(2.) Without defection, Heb. x. 38. *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* Psal. cxix. 112. forecited. We must not forsake our Captain, and go over to the enemies camp; else it had been better for us we had never known the way of righteousness, Luke ix. ult. *No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

II. I shall shew why those that appear to have received Christ, are to be exhorted to cleave resolutely to, and abide by him.

1. Because some such may fall away, as not being really what they appear to be, 1 Cor. x. 12. *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* There are branches in Christ, which being bound up with the stock, by the external bond of sacraments, &c. yet never truly knit with it by faith, that come at length to be taken away, John xv. 2. Some there are, who, if they get not a faster grip of Christ than yet they have got, will surely part with him, by some temptation like a set wedge driven betwixt the Lord and them. But if they would press forward, they may come to get such a grip of him yet, as may secure them against total apostasy.

2. Because exhortations of that nature are means appointed of God, to keep the saints upon their guard against temptations to apostasy, to cause them more resolutely to hold on their way, and to labour to grow up more into Christ, by which they may stand more firm, as in the case of the disciples, John vi. 67. 68. who when Jesus said unto them, *Will ye also go away?* replied by the mouth of Peter, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.* God has joined together the end and the means of his own appointment; therefore though the perseverance of the
saints

faints is put beyond all doubt, from their being members of Christ, yet such exhortations are not in vain.

3. They are of use to others too, to keep them from open and barefaced apostasy. So Joash was kept back from gross extravagancies, while good Jehoiada lived, 2 Chron. xxiv. 2. and xvii. 18. Exhortations from the Lord's word may have a moral influence on men as rational creatures, to keep them back from being so bad as otherwise they would be.

4. Because cleaving to Christ is the comprehensive duty of the Christian life. To believe in him, and cleave to him, is the whole duty of man, as it is summed up by the apostle, Col. ii. 6. *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.* And we know no other holiness of life competent to fallen man, but what is a cleaving to Christ, and walking in him. What is of another stamp among men, is but mere morality, not holiness; John xv. 5. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

I shall now make some practical improvement of this subject.

I exhort you then with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord Jesus Christ. There has been a hopeful appearance among you this day, and some of you have with the most awful solemnity declared your having received him. While ye are in the world, means will be used to withdraw you from him. But I exhort you with purpose of heart to cleave to him, as your all, and in all.

First. Cleave to him as your all. Say with the psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee,* Psal. lxxiii. 25. One throne admits not two kings, nor one heart two masters, viz. Christ and the world, John vi. 44. If ye have received him aright, ye have received him for your all; cleave to him as such; ye need no more,
ye

ye may say, as Phil. iv. 18. *I have all, and abound.* I allude to Gen. xx. 16. and say, *Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes.* And particularly cleave to him,

1. As your God, your Lord, Head and Husband, Psal. xlv. 11. *He is thy Lord, and worship thou him.* Hang by the marriage-tie, O believer, plead it, Cant. ii. 16. *My beloved is mine, and I am his;* and quit it not at any time, no not in your lowest case, Job xiii. 15. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.* But what shall I do when guilt lies on my conscience? Why, quit it not then neither, Jer. iii. 14. *Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you.* Psal. lxxv. 3. *Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.* To do otherwise, is as if one that is fallen should put his hands in his bosom till he wrestle up. Faith is the hand of the soul, and the use of it in its full strength is never unseasonable. Deal not with an absolute God, a God out of Christ; that is not for a guilty creature. Christ is thy Lord and Husband, nay, through the veil of the flesh of Christ, *thy Makers are thine Husbands*, II. Cor. liv. 5. one God in three persons. God was in Christ, that thou mightst be joined to him there: so look thou still to a God in Christ, and receive the law at his mouth, and direct thy obedience to him. "Often," and willingly," saith Luther, "do I inculcate this, that you should shut your eyes and your ears, and say, you know no God out of Christ."

2. As your light through this dark world, John viii. 12. *I am the light of the world,* says Christ. Shut your own eyes; and let him direct your way by his word and Spirit, and ye will walk safely. Consulting sin and duty with flesh and blood, is drawing back from Christ. Cleave to him as your oracle: and depend on him for light to mark out your way, Prov. iii. 5. 6. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* And

when

When ye go to seek light in particular cases, be ready to fall in with what shall be found the Lord's mind, in singleness of heart.

3. As the fountain of your strength for duty, 2 Tim. ii. 1. *Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* Ye have great work to work, salvation and generation work; and ye have a great journey to go. It will not be your weak hands that will work the work; nor your feeble knees that will make the journey, Cant. viii. 5. *Cleave to him and hang on him, like a weak woman on her husband in difficult way.* And never reckon on any strength, but what is in the fountain, be the work more easy or difficult, Is. xl. 30. 31. *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail. But they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.*

4. As the spring of your fruitfulness, John xv. 4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me.* Ye must set yourselves to the practice of holiness, without which no man can see the Lord, and bring forth good works in your life and conversation, as ye would not write yourselves separate from Christ. But to hammer them out of your own faithless endeavours, is to withdraw yourselves from Christ, and to act as standing on a root of your own, and not as branches in Christ.

5. As the only ground of your acceptance with God, Eph. i. 6. Col. iii. 17. A pair of turtle-doves might be accepted on the altar at Jerusalem, while an ox was an abomination on the altar at Bethel. To measure your acceptance with God, by the quantity or quality of your duties, what they have cost you one way or other; and not according to the share you have in the Redeemer's blood, is not cleaving to Christ,

Christ, but departing from him. 'The believer has no confidence in the flesh, Phil. iii. 3.

Lastly, As the rest and the only rest of your souls, Heb. iv. 3. Matth. xi. 28. *Ye shall find rest*; rest to your consciences, which ye are seeking, but cannot get in the law; rest to your hearts, which ye are seeking, but cannot get in the empty creation. Well, take up the twofold rest in him, and hold there. Go not gadding about to seek them any where else but in him. Go not back to the law as a covenant of works, nor to the vain world.

Secondly, Cleave to him in all; for he is altogether and always lovely. And cleave to him,

1. In all that bears his stamp as his own. And cleave,

1st, To his truths, delivered to us in his holy word, Prov. xxiii. 23. *Buy the truth, and sell it not.* Acquaint yourselves with them, by the study of the holy scriptures, our Confession of faith and Catechisms. There is much need for it in these our reeling times. As to the purity of the gospel-doctrine, cleave to it with the greater care, that man's corrupt nature is such an enemy to it. The gospel was no sooner published in paradise, but an angel with a flaming sword behoved to be set to keep Adam from running back to the law as a covenant of works for life, Gen. iii. 22. And no less than the sight of the flaming sword will keep any of us back from it yet, if not in principle, yet in practice.

2dly, To his law as the rule of your life, in all the duties of holiness, John xv. 14. Beware of making exception of the least of them, Matth. v. 19. Cleave to him in first-table duties of piety towards God, external and internal; in second-table duties of justice and mercy towards your neighbours. It will be in vain to call Christ Lord, if ye do not the things which he commands.

3dly, To his ordinances and institutions, public, private, and secret. They are the wells of salvation in

in this weary wilderness, which the travellers cannot want. The ordinances of worship, discipline, and government, as well as purity of doctrine, being the Lord's own institutions, are to be cleaved to, Acts ii. 42.

4^{thly}, To his people following him, and to his interests in the world, 1 John ii. 19. Ye must take your lot with them in this world, if ye would have your lot with them in the other world. *A companion of fools shall be destroyed.* If ye mind for heaven, be companions of those who are travelling thither; and think not to live with the wicked, and die with the righteous. That was Balaam's wish; but he fell short of his wish, Numb. xxxi. 8.

2. In all times, conditions, and circumstances, Psal. cxix. 112. This is the law of the spiritual marriage, that one cleave to Christ the Lord and Husband always unto the end. Particularly,

1st, Cleave to him in an hour of temptation, which ye may be sure ye will meet with, 1 Pet. v. 8. 9. As ye are joined to the Lord, deny the renewed suits of ungodliness and worldly lusts. When temptation comes, know ye are on your trials, to prove whether ye will cleave to Christ or not.

2^{dly}, Cleave to him on all hazards, Psal. xliv. 17. And let not the cross of Christ scare you from following of him. Lay your account with troubles public and private, as the Lord may see meet to tryt you, but withal that nothing shall separate you from him. For motives, consider,

1. The vows of God are upon you to cleave to Christ. Our land is under the bond of a national covenant, and the three nations are under the bond of a solemn league and covenant, to cleave to the Lord, however these bonds are little regarded in our day. Ye also are under sacramental bonds, to cleave to him. Let the conscience of all these move you to cleave to him; and venture not to say, concerning the

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the Lord and his Christ, as Psal. ii. 3. *Let us break their bands afunder, and cast away their cords from us.*

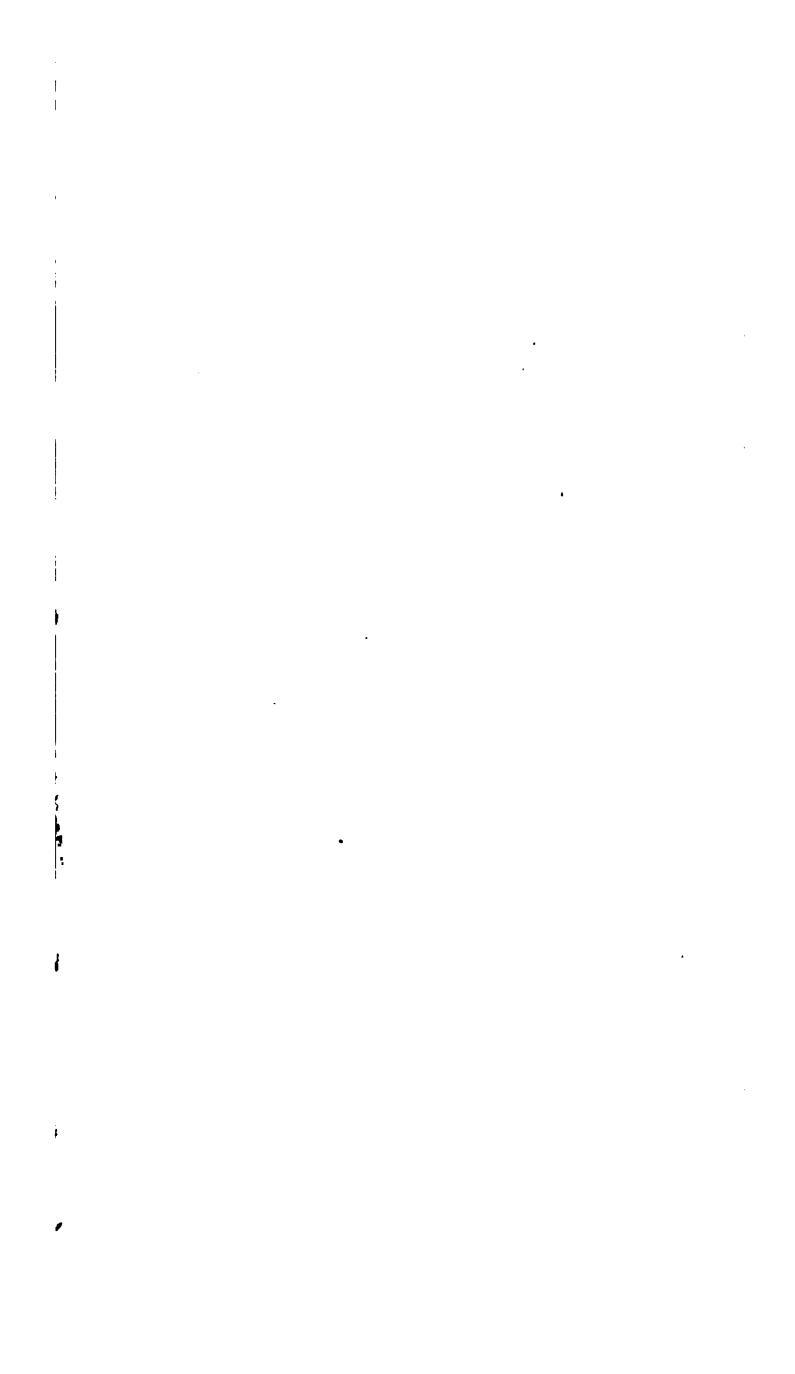
2. It is a backsliding time in which we live; iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxing cold. The more need ye have to take heed. Christ is saying to you, *Will ye also go away?* John vi. 67.

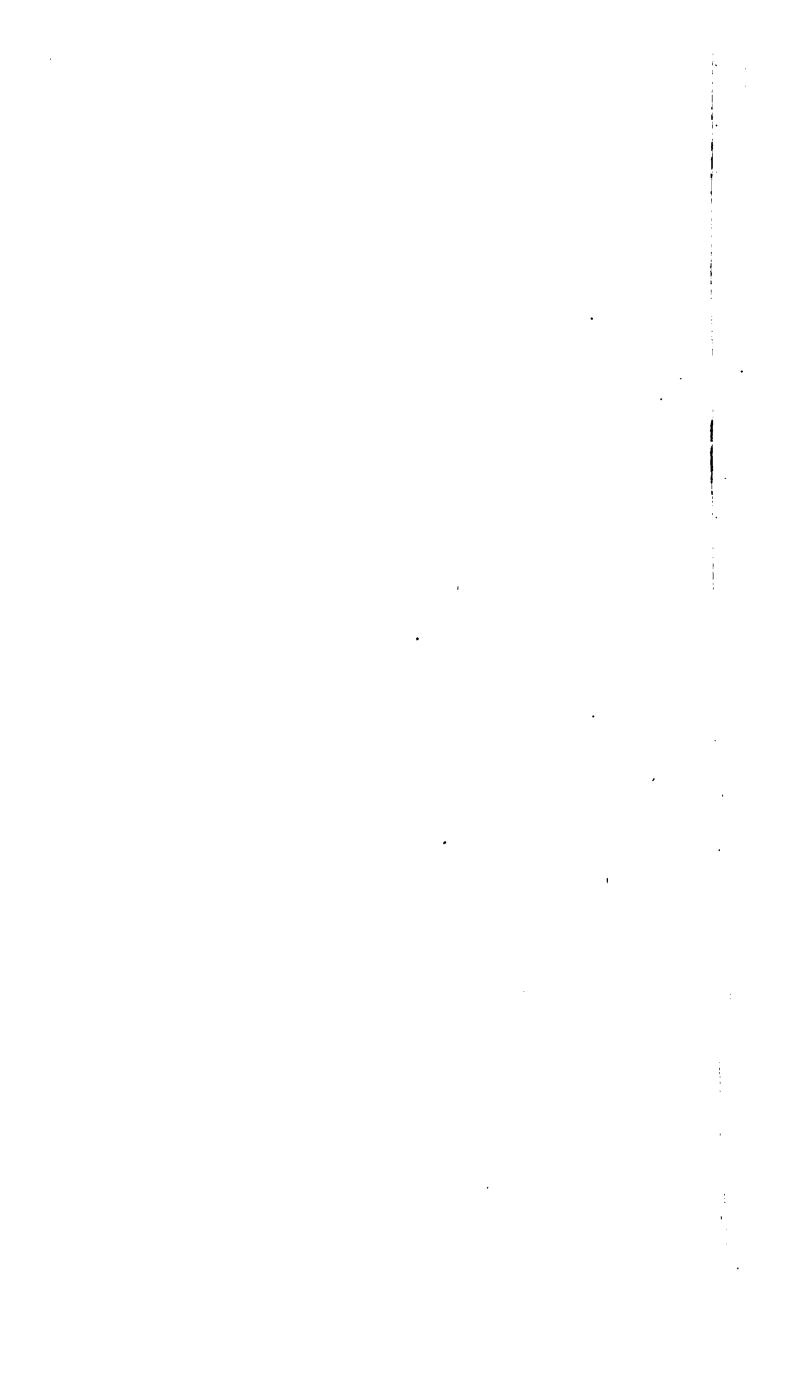
3. Your safety and welfare in the world depends entirely upon your cleaving to Christ. Hold by him, and ye are safe. *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* 1 Pet. iii. 13. Quit him or his way, and ye shall certainly fall in the ditch, however sickle ye may imagine yourselves: *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely,* Prov. x. 9. This world is a wilderness; cleave to him, as ever ye would get safe through.

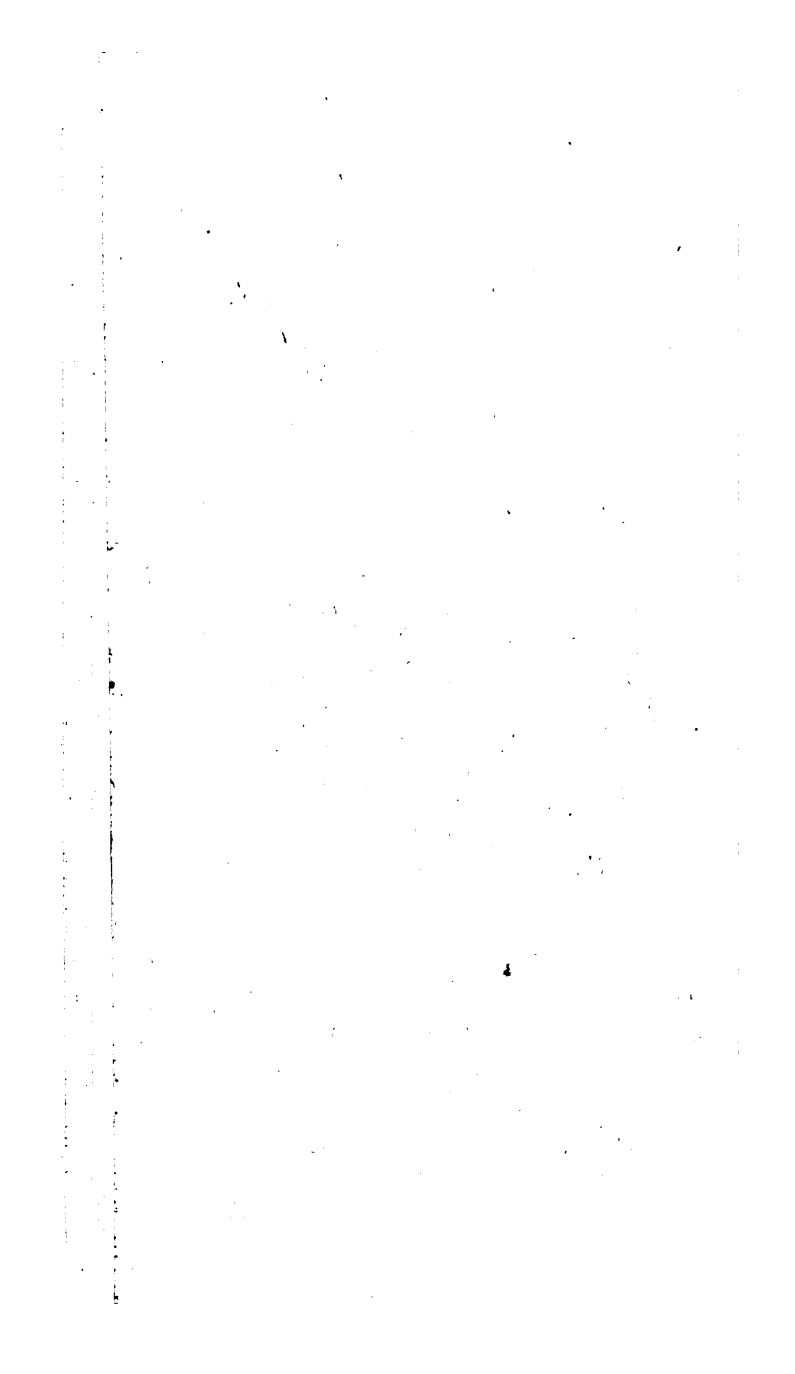
4. *Lastly,* It is not they that set fair off, but *those that endure to the end that shall be saved,* Matth. xxiv. 13. Apostasy will bring a man to eternal ruin, Heb. x. 38. but those who are *faithful to the death shall receive a crown of life,* Rev. ii. 10.

F I N I S.

H.M.







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